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Nation, gender, and the 'rescue fantasy'

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National identity, gender identity, and the 'rescue fantasy' in *Born on the Fourth of July*

ROBERT BURGOYNE

Born on the Fourth of July (Oliver Stone, 1989) can be read as a particularly complex variant of the cultural tendency that Susan Jeffords has called 'the remasculinizing of America': the restoration of patriarchal concepts of nation through narratives that emphasize the renewal of masculine identity in the post-Vietnam period.[1] While Stone's film pointedly criticizes traditional myths of masculinity based on concepts of 'punitive agency', it nevertheless asserts the importance of the masculine role in a changing narrative of nation. Linking the iconography of nationalism to the symbolism of gender in an overt way, the film anatomizes the failure of masculinist national ideals in the Vietnam period, offering in its closing scenes an alternative image of nation based on the metaphor of a maternal, social body America, an 'America who can embrace all her children'.[2] But despite the film's attempt to revise the gender dynamic of national identity, the metaphor of nation as woman in *Born on the Fourth of July* serves mainly to set the scene for a narrative in which the male hero gains authority by 'rescuing' the nation from its own weakness: a pattern that closely resembles the unconscious fantasy that Freud calls the 'rescue motif'.[3] While the film defines the role of the male hero in ways that suggest alternative approaches to masculine identity, its symbolic structure, organized around a series of maternal stereotypes, reveals a deeper gender ambivalence. Its metaphors of nation range from maternal love – the nation as 'milk-giver' – to the nation as 'blood-seeker', a

1 Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

2 Stephanie A. Smith, 'Heart attacks: Frederic Douglass's strategic sentimentality', *Criticism*, vol. XXXIV, no. 2 (1992), p. 193.

3 Sigmund Freud, 'A special type of object choice made by men', *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 163–76.

'vampire' – as if the film's uncertainty towards its own nationalist agenda were projected onto the female figures in the text.[4] In *Born on the Fourth of July* – and the film's title underscores the dominance of the metaphor – maternal images are elevated into emblems of national cohesion on one side, or degraded to images of perversion and division on the other.

In its symbolic and metaphoric trajectory, the film thus appears to confirm Jeffords' thesis that by reaffirming masculinity, the Vietnam narrative also reaffirms other relations of dominance, particularly those of patriarchy. Indeed, this view constitutes the currently accepted critical perspective on the Vietnam film, a perspective that also discerns a straightforward Oedipal patterning as the basis of the drama of masculine subjectivity in these films.[5] But *Born on the Fourth of July* also departs from Jeffords' description of the 'masculine frame of narration' in significant ways, particularly in its equation of what Laura Mulvey has called 'the overvaluation of virility under patriarchy' and the social problems of the Vietnam era.[6] Casting the protagonist explicitly as a victim of masculinist ideology, the film draws on the generic resources of melodrama, a genre long associated with feminine emotion, to articulate the gap between patriarchal cultural ideals and the lived experience of the protagonist. Moreover, while the repression and subordination of the feminine serves, in the view of many critics, as the fulcrum of masculine renewal in Vietnam films, *Born on the Fourth of July* links the recovery of the male hero to the rescue scenario, with its emotions of 'gratitude', 'love', and 'tenderness', and to the substitution of a feminine ideal of national identity for the fracturing violence of patriarchal concepts of nation.[7] In its portrait of the Vietnam veteran as victim of patriarchy on the one hand and as rescuer of a nation imaged as feminine on the other, the film solicits a more complex reading of masculine agency in the Vietnam film than has been given to date.[8]

Jeffords argues that narratives about Vietnam are most deeply concerned with the restabilizing of gender roles, that gender is what representations of the Vietnam era are about: 'though Vietnam representation displays multiply diverse topics for its narratives and imagery, gender is its determining subject and structure . . . . Gender is the matrix through which Vietnam is read, interpreted and reframed in dominant American culture.'[9] Despite the Vietnam narrative's characteristically critical perspective – its display of the 'apparent dissolution of traditional forms of power' – it functions largely, in her understanding, to reinforce the authority of the state: 'along with the renegotiation of masculinity has come a renegotiation and reempowerment of the state . . . rather than the Vietnam experience challenging the current structures of American society, it seems only to enhance them'.[10] In contrast to Jeffords, I feel that *Born on the Fourth of July*, which I take as an emblematic

4 Smith, 'Heart attacks', pp. 193–216.

5 In a recent article, Michael Selig has drawn attention to numerous analyses based on this premiss. See Michael Selig, 'Genre, gender, and the discourse of war: the a/historical and Vietnam films', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 1–18.

6 Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 72.

7 Freud, 'A special type of object choice', p. 173, uses these words to describe the emotions associated with the 'rescue fantasy'. This is in sharp contrast with Selig's statement: 'the reconstitution of a heroic male subject, a prerequisite for which is the devaluation and abuse of the feminine' and 'their almost always violent repressions of the feminine'. Selig, 'Genre, gender and the discourse of war', p. 3.

8 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). Elshtain asks whether the 'current accessibility of the "Vietnam experience" in and through the language of victimization, estrangement, therapy, and healing will, over time, narrow the gender gap'. Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 220. To which Jeffords replies: 'Not moving toward a narrowing of the gender gap . . . the new masculine affirms itself as incorporating, not accepting, the feminine'. Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. 130.

9 Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. 53.

10 Ibid., p. 21.

Vietnam film and one most directly concerned with the project of remasculinization, presents a highly critical view of the close relation between masculine identity and nationally sanctioned aggression. To a large extent, the generic codes of melodrama that structure this film directly conflict with what Jeffords calls the 'masculine point of view'. Rather than expressing the 'interests, values, and projects of patriarchy', the film employs melodrama in order to present a critique of US identity conceived along masculinist lines.[11] At the same time, however, the film finally conveys through its melodramatic structure a model of national community based on the nuclear family, to some degree reaffirming traditional forms of gender identity as the dominant perspective through which national identity is realized. *Born on the Fourth of July* can thus be seen as an exemplary manifestation of the complex nature of the Vietnam narrative, in which the most significant issues of national identity, gender identity, and the narrative forms that convey and reinforce them are set into new and shifting configurations.

11 Ibid., p. xiii.

In the pages that follow, I examine the film in terms of three, closely related strategies of representation. I begin by delineating the film's use of melodramatic conventions and structures, which serve, I argue, as an index of its social ideology, and which contrast with the forms of narrative that Jeffords associates with the project of 'remasculinization'. Secondly, I consider the film's analysis of masculine identity, arguing that the film puts particular pressure on the link between masculinity and punitive concepts of historical agency. Thirdly, I discuss the film's use of maternal metaphors of nation, arguing that its idealized image of a maternal, social-body USA both departs from masculinist ideology and, at the same time, allows the film to represent the hero as a paternal figure, as the 'rescuer' of the nation, restoring the myth of the nuclear family as an emblem of promised community. I will begin by discussing the film's use of the genre codes of melodrama, which I believe convey a set of messages that both complicate and extend the 'masculine frame of narration' that Jeffords argues prevails in Vietnam representations.

Melodrama and national identity

The historical signals emitted by particular genre forms comprise an important part of the message we receive from an individual text. As Mikhail Bakhtin argues, genres impose their own historical perspectives and systems of value on a work, both recalling past usages and illuminating the present in new ways. In the Vietnam film, critics and theorists have, for the most part, sidestepped the issue of genre by on the one hand claiming that the Vietnam film constitutes a genre in its own right, or on the other stressing the

Vietnam narrative's Oedipal configurations, and its conversion of political and ideological issues into scenes of techno-spectacle.[12] In my view, however, the genre patterning of the Vietnam film, which can generally be characterized as melodramatic, constitutes a rich source of critical insights, allowing us to link the Vietnam narrative with earlier cultural attempts to come to terms with national trauma.

Melodrama has often functioned as an important vehicle of popular historical interest and has, in times of crisis, helped to mould and influence concepts of national identity. In the view of George Lipsitz, melodrama constitutes a privileged form of popular connection with the past, and has provided a 'particularly significant form of participation and investment within American commercial culture since World War II'.[13] Another writer, David Grimstead, extends the influence of melodrama on national consciousness back to the nineteenth century, when theatrical melodrama played an important role in defining the national narrative. According to Grimstead, melodrama served as the 'echo of the historically voiceless'. Its stress on direct feeling as an index of moral value functioned, he maintains, as a 'great equalizer, bypassing inequalities of class and education' and providing a source of national identity for a country 'convinced of the radically egalitarian nature of its social experiment'.[14] Frank Rahill similarly traces the rise of US melodrama to the need to redefine national identity after the Civil War. The cycle of 'frontier sagas' and Civil War dramas that dominated the US stage in the 1880s provided 'the sought for national drama'.[15] In short, melodrama in the USA has historically served as a way of framing national identity in terms of democratic and egalitarian ideals.

In the Vietnam narrative, melodrama has again assumed a privileged role in the articulation of national identity, but in a way that is different from its function in the nineteenth century. As exemplified by *Born on the Fourth of July*, the genre conveys certain historical signals and a consistent system of values, but it has acquired a different 'social accent' as it confronts a new context.[16] In making this comparison, I wish mainly to underline the ways that genres function, as Bakhtin says, as forms of cultural memory. Genres are best understood, he argues, as repositories of social experience, crystallized forms of social and cultural perception, 'organs of memory' that embody the world view of the period from which they originated, while carrying with them the 'layered record of their changing use'.[17] In his view, they are the principal vehicles for shaping and carrying social experience from one generation to another, the connecting 'drive belts from the history of society to the history of language and literature'.[18] Through the process Bakhtin calls 'genre memory', aesthetic forms both 'remember the past . . . and redefine present experience in an additional way'.[19]

12 Several critics have objected to this characterization of the Vietnam film as a genre, including Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, 'Introduction – America's Vietnam War films: marching toward denial' in Dittmar and Michaud (eds), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 1–15.

13 George Lipsitz, *Time Passages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 15.

14 David Grimstead, 'Melodrama as echo of the historically voiceless', in Tamara Hareven (ed.), *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth Century Social History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 80–98.

15 Christine Gledhill, 'The melodramatic field: an investigation', in Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987) p. 25.

16 Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 219.

17 Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) pp. 290–92.

18 Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 278.

19 Ibid., pp. 293, 297.

This leads to the concept of 'double-voicing', which occurs when an older genre is adapted to a new context.

In *Born on the Fourth of July* melodrama retains its historical provenance, visible in its emphasis on the claims of emotion and in its attempt to frame national identity in terms of familial relations.[20] But more importantly, it defines the Vietnam narrative in a way that allows it to be joined to the broader national narrative, imposing a kind of teleological resolution on a national trauma whose materialization in culture has been exceptionally partial, protracted, and resistant to completion. The structural patterns of melodrama serve to fill out and set into place a narrative project – the cultural narrative of the Vietnam war and its aftermath – whose symbolic resolutions have only slowly seeped to the surface. In my view, the essential character roles and narrative patterns of the Vietnam 'experience' congeal in *Born on the Fourth of July* into a form in which the historical period now appears to be rounded out and resolved, translated from the realm of political and ideological contradiction to the realm of universal family values. This is accomplished in the film by using the generic patterns of melodrama in both critical and affirmative ways, to critique the role of the family for its complicity in the war, and yet to reaffirm the cultural role of the Vietnam veteran as rescuer of the nation and paternal figure: the begetter of a new national paradigm.

In the film, which I see as both a compendium of Vietnam themes as well as the culminating work of the cycle, the theme of victimization is accompanied by two additional melodramatic tropes that can be isolated as fundamental to its historical project: the trope of 'misrecognition', and the device of the 'rescue'. The trope of misrecognition dominates the first half of the film, bringing the Janus-faced nature of national identity into relief as the seemingly irreconcilable gulf between the ideals of the protagonist and the actuality he confronts, between his past and his present, opens up a series of contradictions. The rescue motif organizes the second half of the film, allowing the male protagonist to redeem himself by 'saving' the nation and restoring the national community to a form more closely resembling the ideal US homeland, a motif which is facilitated by the metaphoric identity of nation and woman.

By first approaching *Born on the Fourth of July* from this perspective, I wish to show how the film utilizes the cultural memory embedded in genre to shape and define its historical message. In my view, the 'remasculinizing' narrative trajectory of the film is both qualified and reinforced by this generic intertext. In addition to misrecognition and the rescue motif, many of the most typical melodramatic tropes and devices are used by the film as forms of critical analysis: betrayal, villainy, victimization and the personification of social forces in emblematic characters are recoded

20 The historical film has often been denigrated precisely for its melodramatic tendencies – its assimilation of history to 'the whole panoply of domestic conflicts' so that '[h]istory is shut into that order' (Stephen Heath, 'Contexts', *Edinburgh '77 Magazine*, p. 42); its inability to depict 'social or historical happenings without centering those events around the lives of a few individuals' (David Bordwell, Kristen Thompson, Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* [Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985] p. 13). These tendencies, I argue, are not fatal failings but rather powerful strategies for questioning an American master narrative that relies for its effectiveness on its reproduction and consolidation in the structures of the family. If the family serves, in the present, as the main conduit of national and political identity, then a genre form traditionally centred on the domestic sphere would seem to be the appropriate vehicle for its analysis and critique.

to express the rejection of older ideologies and the formulation of a different kind of national identity.

Throughout the first half of the film the main character, Ron Kovic, enthusiastically presents himself as the representative of a nationalistic tradition defined by military force and moral rectitude. But after participating in the massacre of a Vietnamese village of women and children, witnessing the coverup of his own accidental killing of another US soldier, Corporal Wilson, and then being severely wounded himself, the character is wrenched from his secure historical identity, experiencing a kind of dissolution of self. Paralyzed from the chest down, he sees himself as a victim of all the institutions that had previously defined him: family, community, the armed forces, history itself. The film uses his estrangement from the past to explore the erosion of a historical order that had imprinted itself on the gestures, behaviour and attitudes of his social milieu.

The first part of the film in many ways echoes the tendency Christine Gledhill describes in her discussion of King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928): 'a specific date links a national historical occasion with an individual birth rather than a social fabric . . . . The nation's story will be vested in the individual trajectory.'[21] Emphasizing both the typicality and the 'individuality' of the main character, the opening scenes of the film unfold as a kind of diorama of national stereotypes: young Kovic playing 'soldiers' and baseball, celebrating his birthday at a Fourth of July parade, being kissed by a girl to the accompaniment of fireworks, competing in high-school athletics; the common identity of nation and individual is evoked and underlined through the exceptional typicality of these scenes. But the 'uniqueness' of the character is also asserted, most directly by Kovic's mother who calls her son her 'Yankee Doodle Dandy', and who singles him out by relating her premonitory dream, on the occasion of Kennedy's inauguration, that he would one day be speaking in front of a large crowd.

By presenting these scenes in a visual style that is almost operatic – moving from one dramatic set piece to another with few of the connecting devices of narrative, with slow motion and music augmenting their emotional temperature – the film expresses a sense of intense feeling as well as a sense of falseness and inauthenticity. The small-town world of the fifties and early sixties is portrayed in the opening in an overtly nostalgic manner that is strikingly reminiscent of the 'Morning in America' theme of the Reagan campaign. The hometown universe of the protagonist is shown to be thoroughly permeated by the mythology of the period: pop songs, the Kennedys, Marilyn Monroe, the Yankees, television, family, the memory of World War II. These leitmotifs of mid twentieth-century America encapsulate a world steeped in popular legend, a world replete with mass-produced images through which the characters live out their lives. In foregrounding these stereotypes of the fifties and

21 Christine Gledhill, 'Between melodrama and realism: Anthony Asquith's *Underground* and King Vidor's *The Crowds*', in Jane Gaines (ed.), *Classical Hollywood Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 145.

early sixties, the film emphasizes the consensual nature of the society, the cocoon-like enclosure of a period in which the dominant culture was largely unchallenged. Although the cultural changes associated with the youth movement and the civil rights movement were certainly apparent by 1965, ideological conflict is almost entirely absent from the suburban world the film depicts. Instead, the film emphasizes the naivete and emotional idealism of the dominant culture of the early sixties, the contentment and complacency that Frederic Jameson calls the 'misery of happiness', the self satisfaction of small-town life which is seen to represent the whole of pre-Vietnam America.[22] The overall strategy of the film, however, is not so much to repudiate this picture of national life, which will be resurrected in the closing moments of the film, as to revise it and transfer its authority to more progressive features of the national text.

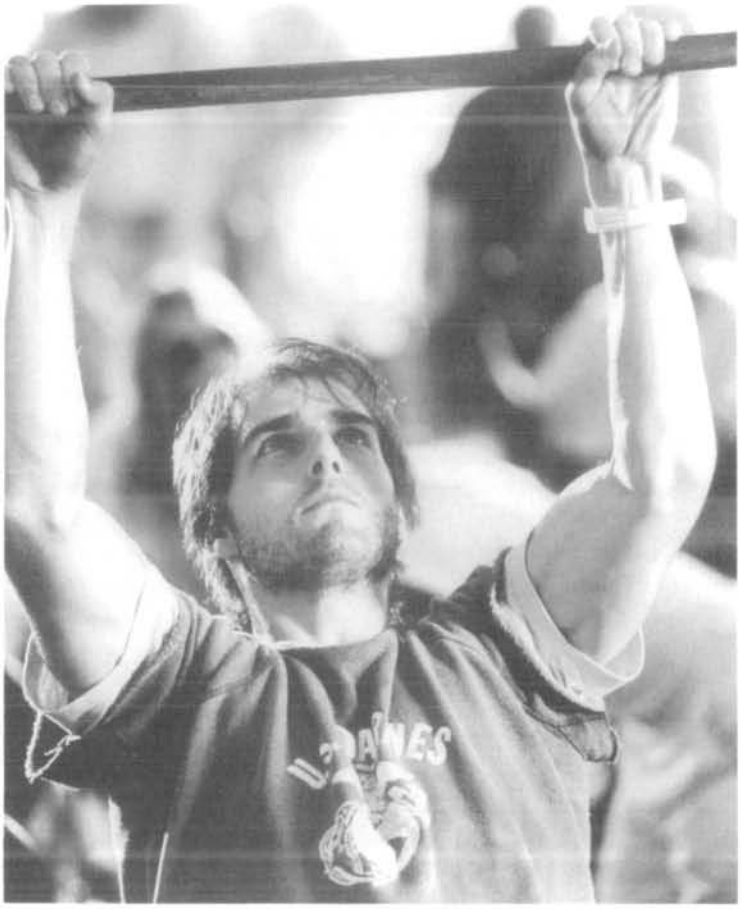
22 Frederic Jameson, 'Nostalgia for the present', in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 280.

The second major sequence of the film functions as an explicit reversal of the opening boyhood scenes. After being wounded in Vietnam, Kovic is sent to a VA hospital to recover from his paralyzing injury. With its scenes of physical deterioration, body wastes and psychological degradation, the hospital sequence attains the status of *grand guignol* without departing from a realistic portrait of the milieu. Rats, physical abuse, a negligent medical staff, the omnipresence of death and putrefaction; are all conveyed in a urine-yellow colour and in a series of shock cuts that contrast vividly with the filtered luminescence of the boyhood scenes. In the contrast between the sentimentality and emotion of the opening and the historical and personal tragedy of Vietnam, the film insists upon the radical alterity of the two experiences whilst implying a necessary connection between the two. The stark antitheses, distinguishing the boyhood sequences and the body of the film, function as a kind of dramatic reversal, which Thomas Elsaesser claims often has the effect of 'exposing the incurably naive moral and emotional idealism in the American psyche'. Elsaesser argues that melodrama uses sentiment and emotion in a dialectical way: by identifying characters with illusory hopes and self-delusion and then forcing a confrontation 'when it is most wounding and contradictory',[23] melodrama opens up contradictions that realism, by contrast, seeks to contain.[24]

23 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 43–69.

24 Gledhill, 'Between melodrama and realism', pp. 146–7.

In scenes reminiscent of the crusading melodramas of Dickens, Hugo, and Eugene Sue, the film's indictment of government institutions and policies is set out in the language of individual victimage. Its withering critique of the VA hospital system, which can be taken as emblematic of larger social pathologies, is centred on the private ordeal of Ron Kovic; continuously processed through the subjective experiences of the protagonist. Sequences of physical and psychological distress are intercalated, however, with Kovic's initial encounters with black consciousness and the antiwar



Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989). Courtesy: United International Pictures UK/BFI Stills.

movement to suggest a dawning awareness of a larger social pathology, a social system in an extreme state of unhealth, rendered in microcosm in the world of the VA hospital. These themes can be glimpsed in a dream sequence in which Kovic rises from his bed and walks past his grey, unconscious roommates, fellow victims of institutional neglect, who seem to come to life as he passes – a sequence that foreshadows his later political role. But in the closed world of the VA hospital, he cannot shape events or influence his milieu: he is acted upon. He becomes a typical protagonist of melodrama, acquiring what Elsaesser calls a 'negative identity through suffering'.[25]

25 Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury', p. 55.

In the course of these two antithetical scenes, the film plays heavily on the melodramatic device of misrecognition. Kovic, the film implies, has misrecognized the true nature of the nation, and he is now being confronted with the reality of national life. Thrust from a childhood world of glistening surfaces to a world of Goyaesque disasters, he is unable to recognize himself, or the America that he

left behind; the fixed points of his ideological compass simply do not correspond to the reality he encounters. The theme of misrecognition is articulated to greatest effect, however, in the homecoming sequence, as the false promises and seductive appeals of national identity receive their clearest embodiment and expression in the character of Kovic's mother. Emblem of both family ideals and national betrayal, the role of the mother focuses the contradictory interests of the text in an explicit way, embodying both positive and negative concepts of national identity.

As Kovic's mother comes to meet him for the first time since his paralyzing injury, the music swells in an emotional arc that is immediately countermanded by the distance and strain evident between mother and son. Unable to accept his condition, the mother, after a few inane and remarkably inadequate queries and responses, resolutely turns away from him. But while the mother is depicted as completely lacking in emotion and sympathy, the music accompanying this scene is unambiguously emotional and tender. The disparity between the musical accompaniment and the behaviour of the characters expresses simultaneously the duality of recognition and misrecognition, of desire and estrangement, of intense feeling and socially-defined roles that is at the heart of the first half of the film.

The conflicting signals that mark this scene as the obverse of a typical melodramatic homecoming reveal the larger historical message of the film. Kovic's 'homecoming' will be deferred, the film implies; displaced to the end of the film when the character and the society have undergone the transformative changes of the decade. Although the music underlines the significance the film assigns to notions of family, community and 'home', these themes are placed in the service of a historical argument concerning the changing face and nature of the nation. Oliver Stone's portrayal of Kovic's mother, which has been heavily criticized for its negativity, can be understood in this context. A kind of composite portrait of atavistic values, the mother represents the old America, the America of the fifties. Cut off from the 'mother culture' after his wounding, the character must find a new cultural, political and sexual identity.

Thus, while the first half of the film emphasizes the melodramatic tropes of misrecognition and victimization, it also inverts some of melodrama's traditional sources of cultural authority, revising the role of the mother, community and family. The mother in particular is painted as selfish and heartless, a 'blood-seeker rather than a milk-giver', to use the words of Frederick Douglass.[25] This inversion might be seen as an aspect of the 'double-voicing' that occurs when an older genre is fitted to a new content. In the Vietnam narrative, the nuclear family is a site of profound ambivalence, often depicted as both the cradle of hypocrisy and as the matrix of positive forms of identity. In this case, as Pavel Medvedev says, 'genre appraises

25 Smith, 'Heart attacks'.

reality, and reality clarifies genre'.[27] The picture that *Born on the Fourth of July* presents of the malevolent influence of the family, a subject which I address at greater length below, draws on the resources of melodrama but it evokes the themes and motifs of the genre in a complicated way, in order, partly, to crystallize its rejection of the reality that it traditionally conveys. At the conclusion of the film, however, the nuclear family (and the image of the mother in particular) is restored as the emblem of a nation seen once again as a loving heartland. As we will see, this redemption of the maternal figure, and of the family, is expressly related to another of the resources and potentials of melodrama, namely, the 'rescue motif' which organizes the second half of the film.

27 Pavel Medvedev, quoted in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 277.

The critique of masculinity as 'punitive agency'

As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has pointed out, the link between doing and suffering, action and passion – themes that were once securely joined – has been severed since the Romantic period. In US films, these roles have typically been separated into different genres, with male heroes 'impervious to suffering' dominating genres such as the Western and the action film, while female characters, 'whose role it is to suffer', dominate melodrama. Suffering and impotence, the failure to act in the world, were seen until very recently not as part of the human condition but rather as the consequences of a 'failure to be male'.[28] In contrast, *Born on the Fourth of July* foregrounds the copresence of acting and suffering in a way that breaks the stereotype of the male hero. While the resolution of the film links sexuality and social efficacy in a way that could probably only be attained by a male protagonist, the critique of the dominant cultural ideal of masculinity and the search for an alternative masculine identity is a central element of its social and political message. With its emphasis on sentiment and emotion, the film suggests not so much the patriarchal appropriation of a feminine mode of discourse, but rather a return to the Aristotleian definition of history as that which 'Alcibiades did and suffered'.[29]

28 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and melodrama', in Gledhill, *Home Is Where The Heart Is*, p. 72.

29 Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. 138.

While the search for alternative masculinities has been identified as a dominant motif of nineties Hollywood films, *Born on the Fourth of July*, released in 1989, emblematizes the shift from the spectacular images of muscular masculinity that defined the films of the previous decade to a more internal, psychologically-nuanced model of male identity. In a recent article, Susan Jeffords argues that the continuing decline of traditional sources of masculine authority, such as the workplace and the 'national structure', has fuelled a move away from the 'highlighted masculinity' – masculinity as violent spectacle – that characterized the Reagan years to an

exploration of the male character's 'ethical dilemmas, emotional traumas, and psychological goals'.[30] A parallel can be drawn to an earlier period when the reformulation of national identity went hand in hand with the rejection of older models of male subjectivity. For example, Frederick Douglass in his writings after the Civil War explicitly rejected the 'terse, masculine style' of his celebrated *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* . . . in order to convey a different form of masculine and national identity; embracing a discourse of sentiment and emotion, he sought to transcend the association of freedom and liberty with masculinized, 'punitive' agency. As one commentator on Douglass explains: 'Mastery, masculinity, and agency are often linked to death, so that, rhetorically, to gain a manhood guaranteed by violence, no matter how liberating, was to incur fracturing penalties that could tear "life" from "liberty" . . . . Douglass used sentimentality [as a way] to conceive of [an] identity that does not require liberty to be divorced from life, or mother from child, male from female, subject from object. What Douglass tried to do was map a definition of "America" that did not require one to wield a whip.'[31]

Something similar to this rewriting of masculine and American identity through the rhetoric of emotion occurs, in my view, in *Born on the Fourth of July*. In dramatizing the transformation of a protagonist who defines himself, from the outset, along the archetypal lines of male power the film brings together suffering and acting in a way that departs from American myths of the national hero, traditionally based on what Richard Slotkin calls 'regeneration through violence'.[32] While *Born on the Fourth of July* begins with an image of 'omnipotent masculinity', it deliberately details the disintegration of this ideal, as the display of male prowess in its opening scenes is steadily replaced by representations of interiority that stress the main character's 'sensitivities, traumas and burdens'.[33] However, in its approach to what one critic calls the 'dilemma of masculine subjectivity',[34] the film oscillates between progressive and regressive ideas; it offers a searching critique of the relation between nationally-sanctioned aggression and the construction of masculine identity, but ultimately resolves the 'dilemma' of masculine identity by casting the character in the role of leader in the antiwar movement, dramatizing his political ascendancy in a scene that unmistakeably echoes the combat 'proving ground' of the generic war narrative.

Nevertheless, *Born on the Fourth of July* departs significantly from the Oedipal scenario that for so many critics has become synonymous with male-focused narratives, especially those dealing with Vietnam and, more generally, combat and war.[35] Instead, the film offers a trajectory of masculine identity that does not depend on punitive definitions of agency or subjectivity. Although the rebelliousness and defiance of the main character would appear to

30 Susan Jeffords, 'Can masculinity be terminated?' in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 245–62.

31 Smith, 'Heart attacks', p. 209.

32 Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

33 Jeffords, 'Can masculinity be terminated?', p. 259.

34 Ina Rae Hark, 'Animals or Romans', in Cohan and Hark (eds), *Screening the Male*, p. 153.

35 See Steve Neale, 'Aspects of ideology and narrative form in the American war film', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991), pp. 35–57.

have an Oedipal accent, the film, on the whole, is not centred on male rivalry or the substitution of one father-figure with another. Unlike Oliver Stone's earlier film *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* revolves around definitions of masculine agency that are forged in relation to women, as it insistently plays out the metaphor of the USA as a woman. While the rescue scenario that organizes the trajectory of the hero is fraught with limitations and patriarchal assumptions, it does mark a shift in gender roles and permits the film to question certain cultural definitions of masculinity. I would suggest that what Freud calls the rescue motif or rescue fantasy, which I discuss at greater length below, might constitute a fundamental, underlying structure of the various narratives of masculinity, especially those involving Vietnam and its aftermath, that are currently being produced.

In first constructing the character of Ron Kovic as an avatar of masculinist mythology, the film seems to literalize the theme sounded by Slotkin, that 'myths reach out of the past to cripple, incapacitate, or strike down the living'.[36] The thesis that US identity hinges on an ethos of violence is evoked from the opening scenes of the film, which feature Kovic as a child playing war games in the forest, noticing the disabled veterans of World War I being wheeled down the street during his hometown parade, and struggling, in a scene of slow-motion spectacle, against a superior male opponent in a wrestling match. The opening of the film illustrates the point made by Paul Willemen about the typical figuration of male characters in the cinema: 'The viewer's experience is predicated on seeing the male "exist" (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in and through cityscapes, landscapes, or more abstractly, history. And on the unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated . . . and restored through violent brutality.'[37]

The relation between male sexual identity and the warrior ethos is also made explicit at several key points: when the Marine recruitment team comes to Kovic's high school, for example, and the speaker begins boasting about the Marines accepting only 'the best', Kovic is seen stealing a glance at his childhood sweetheart, Donna, walking by with another man. Later, when he decides to enlist, he is shown discussing his decision with his friends while they pass around a copy of *Playboy*. The ideal of masculinity set up by the dominant culture is strenuously asserted throughout the first half of the film, but when Kovic persists in defining himself as the embodiment of the warrior ethos even after sustaining his paralyzing wound in Vietnam, the message his broken body communicates recodes the masculinist ideology he espouses into a message of self destruction.

In *Born on the Fourth of July*, the wound suffered by the protagonist becomes the mark of a history which is not to be passed on, of a tradition to be resisted. The character's injury reveals to

36 Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, p. 5.

37 Paul Willemen, 'Anthony Mann: looking at the male', *Framework*, vol. 15–17 (1981), pp. 16–20.

Small-town life in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989). Courtesy: United International Pictures UK/BFI Stills.

him a different side of the national narrative; the national past is now perceived as an unbroken chain of broken bodies extending from the disabled veterans of the boyhood parade scene to the present. Although centred on the character's internal struggle to recover his sexual identity – and the dialogue is filled with references to castration, to not being a man, to wanting to be whole again – the film brings into sharp focus the ideology of masculinity implicit in the military and national tradition he has begun to reject. The character's wound has the effect of defamiliarizing the various ideological props of masculine identity. The military, patriotism, sports, the family, religion, professions – the various supports and appurtenances of masculinity are overtly scrutinized and rejected.

The uncoupling of the character from the national narrative that had defined him from birth is explicitly dramatized in the Fourth of July celebration at which he is honoured for his service in Vietnam. The film stages his breakdown in a highly symbolic fashion. Riding in the hometown parade, a direct echo of the boyhood birthday celebration, Kovic finds himself wincing at the sound of firecrackers, derided by young protestors, and demoralized by the long list of soldiers from Massapequa killed in Vietnam. Called upon to address the townspeople, he is unable to muster the words that would link Vietnam and the sacrifices it entailed to a tradition of heroic endeavour. The sound of a baby crying on the soundtrack, together with the sound of a helicopter, trigger memories of the traumatic incident in Vietnam when his platoon fired on a village of women and children, and when he mistakenly shot and killed a man under his command. The linking of person and nation that has constructed

the character as an emblem of patriotism from the beginning of the film here conveys an opposite meaning: to be born on the fourth of July has become synonymous with murder and death.

Cutting directly from the failed Independence Day parade to a television newscast of protestors marching on the Capitol, the film pointedly juxtaposes the attenuated mythology of wartime heroism to the growing popular discontent with the war. The increasing occlusion of US society manifests itself in the living rooms, bar rooms, hospitals, universities and the suburban streets of the film; former enclaves of social consensus which became, in the sixties, a new kind of border zone. The internal divisions of the period bring the liminal and contestatory character of national identity to the forefront, as if the borders marking the limits of the nation had been displaced to the centre. In a sense, the character, at this point in the narrative, constructs himself as a kind of outsider in his own culture, a colonial subject living under the rule of a foreign power. Cut off from mainstream values, he becomes part of an America of 'others'. His alienation is expressed in a series of scenes in which he severs his ties with family, childhood, the community and the military tradition. At this prepolitical juncture, he defines himself principally by what he is not.

In the ensuing scenes, Kovic travels to Mexico, where he visits a seaside bordello that caters to the sexual needs of paralyzed veterans. Here the film makes it clear that the crisis of masculinity the character experiences is really two crises: a shattering of male sexual identity caused by his paralysis and a more complicated, deeper loss of identity; the loss of affiliation with a larger social order; the loss of identification with the nation. In Mexico Kovic attempts to recover a kind of physical authority based on the restoration of his sexual identity. Here, in a sequence that might be called the 'virgin rebirth', Kovic has sex for the first time with a sympathetic prostitute and experiences a powerful sense of renewal and regeneration. But the brute, physical definition of masculinity that the protagonist soon adopts – signified by the growth of facial hair, the eating of the worm from bottles of Mescal and the rather cynical use of prostitutes – quickly degenerates into exploitation and subjugation. The imagery of sex and renewal, emblematized in the full moon that illuminates his first lovemaking, gives way to the imagery of death. He begins experiencing flashbacks to the death of the soldier he mistakenly killed in Vietnam in an incident of 'friendly fire'. In Kovic's memory Wilson, who had been shot through the throat, is seen trying to speak, but the only sound that is heard is the crying of a baby, a memory-image that brings together not only the deaths of Wilson and the massacred women and children in Vietnam but also, and more importantly, the identification of Kovic with the orphaned infant. The illusion of masculine power he constructs in Mexico is decoded by the

unconscious into its opposite, a sense of infantile helplessness.

Significantly, the character returns in memory neither to the incident of his own wounding nor to the point when his body was shattered and torn apart, but rather to the point when masculine power and aggression led to acts of villainy. Thus the film situates Kovic's loss in the context of a larger failed narrative: the failure of Vietnam; the failure to accomplish the task; the failure to maintain mastery. Much of this section of the film revolves around the drama of the character's humiliation, his reversion to an infantile position. As Scott Benjamin King writes in a discussion of *Miami Vice*, 'the male character take[s] on a role usually given to women: the ragged survivor of the narrative'.[38]

38 Scott Benjamin King, 'Sonny's virtues: the gender negotiations of *Miami Vice*', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), p. 292.

Memory also plagues the other characters who have exiled themselves in Mexico. The illusion of fraternity, of an integral male world that the paralyzed veterans in Mexico try to sustain through poker games, feats of drinking and sexual bravado, soon collapses into the naked expression of guilt and self-hatred. These themes come together in a powerful scene of self-excoriation rendered, pointedly, in the form of a contest. After Kovic and his friend, played by Willem Dafoe, another paralyzed veteran, are left alone on a rural Mexican road by a disgusted cab driver, they begin circling each other in their wheelchairs, spitting at one another and claiming, with vehemence, that they had each 'put their soul on the line', that they had each fully experienced the horror of Vietnam, that they had each 'killed babies too'. They begin to wrestle in their wheelchairs, spitting, clawing and cursing at one another, and wind up grappling in the ditch alongside the road. In this scene, the spectacle of masculine combat that so often serves as the climax of male film genres – the spectacle of the duel, the joust, the swordfight – is both invoked and inverted. The boyhood icons and ideals of the characters have come to this, the film suggests, to a desperate struggle against men who are their mirror image. Circling each other in a helpless spiral, they express the trauma of their past experiences in the language of male aggression, a language of competition, oneupmanship and ridicule.

After Vietnam, the film implies, the rituals and icons of male identity – the formation of male subjectivity in war games, varsity sports and heroic physical prowess – acquire a different meaning. But what the film posits as an alternative masculine identity, one divorced from concepts of punitive agency, is highly problematic in its own right. As Steve Neale points out, images of masculinity in film are often caught between what he calls narcissistic authority, mainly based on physical power, control and action (exemplified for him by the early Clint Eastwood films) and social authority, in which the male hero becomes identified with abstract values such as the law, the social order and, by extension, the nation.[39] In *Born on the*

39 Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as spectacle', in Cohan and Hark, *Screening the Male*, pp. 14–15.

Fourth of July, the male hero follows a similar trajectory from identity based on physical, phallic power and aggression, to identity based on his ability (as one critic writes about a different film) to harness 'phallic aggression to the ideas of freedom, brotherhood, and home'.[40]

40 Hark, 'Animals or Romans', p. 161.

In the film's closing scenes, in which Kovic leads the protest at the Republican Convention in 1972, he assumes both attributes of masculine identity, serving as spokesman for the antiwar movement as well as strategizing and physically leading the storming of the security gate at the convention hall. Directly after, he is shown in the role of keynote speaker at the Democratic Convention in 1976. Here, we witness the acquisition of a new kind of phallic authority: the public and the private, the physical and symbolic, and the punitive and nonviolent senses of masculine identity come together at the end of the film in a way that asserts, above all, the paramount importance of leadership and individualism. Jeffords sees this type of resolution as an aspect of an emerging pattern in nineties Hollywood films. Writing on the film *Terminator 2* (James Cameron, 1991), she says that 'individual men . . . are made to seem not only effective but necessary, both to the protection of women and children and to the survival of humanity . . . the power of individual decision-making and individual action is drawn as paramount . . . . Male viewers – particularly white male viewers – who may feel increasingly distanced from what they understand to be traditional male forms of power and privilege can be empowered through the assertions of the role male individualism must play in the future . . .'[41]

41 Jeffords, 'Can masculinity be terminated?', pp. 257–8.

Centred as it is on images of masculinity and codes of masculine behaviour, it may seem somewhat surprising that *Born on the Fourth of July* confines its images of father figures to the biological father of Ron Kovic. In contrast to Kovic's mother, his father displays marked tenderness and heartfelt emotion at the fate of his son. As an alternative model of masculinity, however, Kovic's father lacks anything like social or phallic authority. He stands as a type of emasculated male, familiar from the films and television shows of the fifties; a man whose emotionalism combined with a lack of masculine authority disqualify him as an erotic object or figure of identification. The key relation of desire and identification remains that of the nation, and its avatars are not the male characters of the text, but the female characters who are vested with all the qualities of potency, destructiveness, ambivalence and understanding that are required for the text to recreate, through the agency of its hero, an ideal American homeland. As we will see, the restoration of the figure of the mother is essential to the establishment of this relation of desire. Repudiated by the text in previous scenes, the mother will be elevated by the end of the film into a symbol of national ideals.

Imaging the nation

While nations are commonly represented in the form of idealized feminine figures, *Born on the Fourth of July* gives the metaphor of the USA as woman – more precisely, as mother – an unusual thematic and structural emphasis. Motivating the key events of the plot along the lines of the familial dynamic it implies, the film draws from this metaphor a scenario of the nation as a wayward and misguided woman, whose salvation depends on the efforts of its hero.[42] With the title of the film signalling the importance of the maternal metaphor, we are led to notice both the consistency and range of the various images of motherhood the film presents. Three contrasting figurations of nation as woman are set forth by the film. Initially, Kovic's mother, like America itself, turns away from her son, unable to accept his physical and emotional condition. Later, in a scene set in the South, the film supplies a maternal figure who functions as an icon of forgiveness and understanding; an emblem of promised community who sets aside her own pain to sympathize with the protagonist. Between these two images, that of the 'blood-seeker' and the 'milk-giver',[43] the film introduces a third stereotype, pervasive in Vietnam representations – the whore – embodied by the Mexican prostitute who introduces the protagonist to carnal experience. By inserting the figure of the whore into its maternal constellation, associating her with the mother in an explicit way, the film reveals the basic, underlying pattern of its narrative of nation. The dramatic and symbolic logic of the film rehearses, in close detail, what Freud calls the rescue motif or the rescue fantasy, in which a man images he can 'rescue' the woman, sometimes seen as 'degraded' or 'unfaithful', by keeping her on a virtuous path.[44] In patterning its plot after the rescue fantasy, *Born on the Fourth of July* transforms its hero, the Vietnam veteran, into the saviour of the nation, a resolution that recapitulates the evolution of the image of the Vietnam veteran in the films of the eighties.[45]

In the process, however, the very myths of the nuclear family that had contributed to the war are redefined as a solution to the disruptions of national community caused by the war. In this regard, the film is also symptomatic of a general tendency in Vietnam representations. As Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe point out, the ideology of the nuclear family and the autonomous individual had much to do with the social problems of the Vietnam era. In the eighties, however, the nuclear family 'began to look like a solution to the very political problems it had helped produce'. Berg and Rowe make a critical point: 'Rather than exploring just how our myths of the individual and the nuclear family had contributed to the war, the mass media focused instead on how our failure in Vietnam was reflected in the breakdown of the nuclear family and our loss of confidence in "American individualism".'[46] Vietnam was

42 For an extended discussion of the use of feminine 'types' as images of the national character in the nineteenth century, see Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

43 The phrases of Frederick Douglass, quoted in Smith, 'Heart attacks'.

44 Sigmund Freud, 'A special type of object choice', pp. 163–76.

45 Michael Clark, 'Remembering Vietnam', in John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg (eds), *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 177–207.

46 John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, 'The Vietnam War and American memory', in Rowe and Berg, *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, pp. 1–17.

represented in the eighties mainly as a family trauma, embodied in the person of the psychologically-disturbed veteran, who the family structure alone could cure. Even when the American family was not present in the narrative, anxiety about the family was nevertheless visible in a displaced form, shifted onto the Vietnamese peasant family. The massacre or murder of a peasant family, often with a Vietnamese child represented as the sole survivor, became a standard scene in these films. As Berg and Rowe aver, 'the Vietnamese child came to represent, often in sustained close-up, what Americans had done to their own children'.[47] Indeed, the Vietnamese peasant family in these films was constructed along the lines of a nostalgic image of a rural American past; generally depicted as country folk, with grandmother and grandfather prominently displayed, the depiction of the peasants 'all too often looked more like life in Iowa than in Vietnam'.[48]

Born on the Fourth of July adheres to this pattern in broad outline, including closeup shots of massacred peasants and a repeated, traumatic memory scene of a newly-orphaned Vietnamese child; but its analysis of the complicity of mainstream USA in incubating the values and beliefs that allowed the war to occur sets it apart. The fundamental character of American life, with its stress on competition, individualism, and its passion for authority in religion and politics, is held up to scrutiny. The family and the community are explicitly depicted in the first half of the film as the source and breeding ground of the national trauma of Vietnam, but at its conclusion the family and the community are portrayed as the medium of reintegration and, somewhat surprisingly, as the basis of political and historical change. Thus the film seems to combine the elements of an acute critique with an endorsement of the essential morality and benevolence of the American people who, when presented with the facts or, in this case, the 'confession' of the main character, are able to achieve a moral consensus.[49]

These themes are crystallized in the female figures in the text. The portrait of Kovic's mother, for example, stresses the ways in which she inculcates the very values of individualism, male dominance and xenophobia in her son that will ultimately result in the tearing apart of the family, the community and the nation. In the film's portrait of the mother as relentless ideologue – and she seems especially proud that her son will serve in Vietnam – the film comes close to the imagery Frederick Douglass used in describing the slaveholding nation of the pre Civil War years as a 'vampire', whose 'most fertile fields drink daily of the warm blood of my outraged sisters'.[50] Obsessed with fighting communism, convinced that the greatest threat to her son is his sexuality, and equating his athletic success with moral character, Kovic's mother is the conduit for the ideology of the dominant culture, showing the ways, as Berg and Rowe write,

47 Ibid., p. 6.

48 Ibid., p. 6.

49 Ibid., p. 9.

50 Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and my Freedom*, ed. William Andrews (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 225.

that the 'middle class family reproduced domestically the values and attitudes of the public sphere'.[51]

In its blending of the imagery of familial and political authority, *Born on the Fourth of July* illuminates the metaphors through which the USA conceives and represents itself. While the destructive figure of the mother in the first part of the film serves as a powerful indictment of mainstream beliefs during the Vietnam era, the concluding scenes of the film feature a different sort of maternal figure, a character who condenses the attributes of an America perceived as an ideal homeland; a place where community is restored and where the veteran can once again assume a leading role. In many ways the film ends up, as Berg and Rowe conclude about the fate of the Vietnam veteran in general, reaffirming the very institutions, familial and political, that had led to the war in the first place. It reiterates the pattern of many Vietnam films in this regard, in which the isolation of the veteran is finally overcome in an image of communal redemption, where the conflict and division between individual memory and social coherence is resolved, and where the experience of the veteran serves as a kind of moral purification for the culture as a whole. As Michael Clark writes, 'the critical implications . . . have been supplanted by a vision . . . that represents the veteran's presence in Vietnam as a memory of home; our collective relation to the past as a family reunion; and the restoration of the prodigal son as our national destiny'.[52]

Prior to its final scenes of communal redemption, however, the film fashions another metaphor of nation in the scenes set in Mexico. Here the demon/angel dualism described above is suspended for a time in favour of a highly unstable aggregation of the mother and the whore. In emphasizing the role of the Mexican prostitute, the film adheres to the standard iconography of the Vietnam narrative. The figure of the whore appears frequently in the literature and films set in the Vietnam period, and is one of the genre's most heavily invested symbols. While usually depicted as a symbol of racial and sexual 'otherness', the prostitute in Vietnam narratives actually functions as a textual nomad, a figure who migrates from a position of opposition to that of similarity, chiefly through her association with 'American' values of commodity capitalism. In *Born on the Fourth of July*, the Mexican whore who first introduces Kovic to sexual experience is initially set out as the opposite of the film's maternal ideal: sensual, dark and knowing. But the film creates a disturbing and potentially incestuous superimposition of mother and whore in the scene in which Kovic buys the prostitute a crucifix, an object strongly associated with Kovic's mother throughout the first half of the film. Directly after this purchase, however, as he is preparing to present her with the gift, wrapped in paper decorated with hearts and stars, he sees her with another man, squeezing his crotch with seeming affection. As

51 Rowe and Berg, *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, p. 4.

52 Clark, 'Remembering Vietnam', p. 204.

she approaches Kovic's table, saying 'Today we get married, no?', his sense of betrayal is made apparent. From this point forward, the prostitutes at the brothel come to represent for him only dehumanized and anonymous sex, a point literalized in a subjective tracking shot from Kovic's perspective as he wheels along a row of hookers, his eyes directly level with their sexual organs.

In a sense, the whore in Mexico also represents the USA. The prostitute, like the USA, promises 'happiness to everyone but [is] faithful to no one'. The image of the prostitute, 'vendor and commodity in one',[53] recapitulates the image of the USA as soulless commercial profiteer, first conveyed in an earlier scene through the person of Kovic's childhood friend, who spends the Vietnam years building up his fast-food hamburger business (and cheating customers by selling burgers with a concealed hole in the centre), for which he is accorded an honoured place in the Independence Day parade. The USA, like woman, once had intrinsic value, the film seems to be saying; an intrinsic value which has been corrupted by money into an inauthentic version of itself.

53 Miriam Hansen, 'The hieroglyph and the whore: D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*', in Jane M. Gaines (ed.), *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 195.

It remains for Oliver Stone to redeem his image of the USA with another female stereotype, to resecure a traditional, virtuous concept of the homeland. Here we can plainly discern the contours of the Freudian rescue motif as the dominant underlying structure of the film; a fantasy which allows the character to both 'rescue' the nation, figured as a woman who has been turned from the path of true national character, while simultaneously being 'rescued' himself, restored to the community as prodigal son and ultimately as paternal figure.

Freud describes a psychological pattern he calls the 'rescue fantasy' in men who fall in love with a prostitute, and whose erotic interest is dynamically linked to the need to experience jealousy.[54] Typically, they endeavour to 'rescue' the love object by keeping her on the path of virtue. This type of behaviour, according to Freud, stems from the 'mother-complex' – an unresolved libidinal attachment to the mother. The unconscious correlation of mother and prostitute, which seems at first glance to be a relation 'of the sharpest contrast', results from the child's first understanding of sexual intercourse, in which the mother appears to the child to be degraded by intercourse and also 'unfaithful' to the child himself. Although the 'love for a prostitute' that Freud regards as a neurotic symptom is one expression of this complex, childhood fantasies of rescuing the mother, or the father, are commonplace. Freud argues that when they revolve around the mother they can be read as an expression of gratitude, a symbolic attempt to repay her for giving the child his life: 'When a child hears that he owes his life to his parents, or that his mother gave him life, his feelings of tenderness unite with impulses which strive at power and independence, and they generate the wish to return this gift to the parents and to repay

54 Freud, 'A special type of object choice', pp. 163–76.

them with one of equal value'. The child thus forms the fantasy of rescuing the mother and saving her life.

Another way that this wish is expressed is through the fantasy of giving her a child: 'needless to say, one like himself'. Here Freud makes an interesting distinction between rescue fantasies involving the father and those revolving around the mother. With the father, 'it is as though the boy's defiance were to make him say: "I want nothing from my father; I will give him back all I have cost him".' Rescuing him then becomes a way of squaring his account. This fantasy, Freud suggests, is commonly displaced onto other authority figures, such as a king, an emperor, or a president, and in this form often becomes a subject for creative writers (or creative filmmakers, as Stone's later *JFK* [1991] and Wolfgang Petersen's *In the Line of Fire* [1993] attest). When it concerns the father the defiant meaning of the rescue fantasy is paramount, while with the mother it is the tender meaning that is by far the more important, giving rise to the grateful wish of 'giv[ing] her another life'. Of course, giving his mother a child who most resembles himself allows the boy to identify himself completely with his father, in essence, to 'find satisfaction in the wish to be his own father'.

In *Born on the Fourth of July*, however, it is the nation itself, symbolically represented as a mother, that is in need of rescuing. In the erotic relation that Stone and Kovic construct with the concept of America, the symbolic engendering of a new American homeland allows the protagonist both a paternal identity, completing the project of remasculinization, and also rescues and restores the character, in his role as wayward son, to the nuclear family and national community.

The scene at Wilson's family home in Venus, Georgia (and the name of the town highlights the relation of desire that will be recovered here) captures these themes in a vivid way. After visiting Wilson's grave, Kovic arrives at the rural homestead and begins a conversation with Wilson's father. The father begins talking about the Marine colour guard that came to bury his son, and about all the young men the town had lost. Leafing through a family album, he mentions that this town and this family in particular had a proud tradition; that Billy's great grandfather was at the first Battle of Bull Run, his grandfather was in France during World War I, and that his family had fought 'in every war this country's had'. As if to underscore the point, Wilson's young son aims and shoots a toy rifle at Kovic. Kovic takes in the young son, the framed military medals in a glass case, the photos of dead ancestors, the deer's head on the wall, and begins to confess that it was he who had killed Watson in the midst of an ambush, an incident of 'friendly fire' very different from the story the family had been told by the Marines. Wilson's mother forgives him, although Wilson's wife says she cannot.

The role of Wilson's mother is especially emphasized in this

sequence, completing the maternal constellation, the three-way splitting of the maternal figure into demon, angel and whore. As Kovic's rememoration is heard, the mother is frequently seen in closeup, and it is her judgement that is appealed to at the end. Kovic himself appears in the role of surrogate son. The filtering of moral judgement through the maternal character restores the family structure to its dominant place. While the myths of the nuclear family and the individual had been shown in the first half of the film to have contributed to the war, here, a family which 'had fought in every war this country's had' serves as a synechdoche of communal redemption. The scene presents the rememoration of the protagonist as a source not just of individual expiation, but of a wider social purification, which will be completed in the scenes of violent protest and civil disobedience that immediately follow.

The leadership role that Kovic assumes immediately after this scene underscores the presence of the rescue motif, which is augmented by a series of historical parallels and references. As the Civil War song, 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again' is heard on the soundtrack, the scene at Wilson's home dissolves to a shot of the American flag, and then to a group of protest marchers in wheelchairs, arrayed in a way that recalls the 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' fife and drum trio that often serves as an emblem of the Revolutionary War. The imagery of past struggles for national autonomy and identity is recontextualized to express a concept of nation and history as a site of recurrent social struggle. But more importantly these historical references place the protagonist in the symbolic position of fathering the nation anew, according him a masculine form of agency that continues the legacy of the national heroes of the past. In the closing scenes of the film, Kovic claims the role of spokesman for the Vietnamese – 'a proud people who have been struggling for independence for over 1,000 years'; for the paralyzed veterans – 'our wheelchairs, this is our steel – your Memorial Day on wheels. We are your Yankee Doodle Dandies come home'; and for the people of the USA – 'white, black, brown, red, yellow', invoked by Ron Dellums at the Democratic Convention where Kovic addresses the crowd of delegates.

The ending of the film expresses both a sense of restored community as well as what Michael Clark calls 'an ideal of historical continuity that turns Vietnam into just one more chapter in the epic narrative of the American dream'.[55] As the character wheels himself out to the podium, a series of flashbacks to his childhood appear. A past that had been synonymous with an order of destructive social uniformity is folded back into a utopian vision of a transformed social world. And the Vietnam veteran, no longer a divisive or menacing force, is here celebrated by the media and presented as a new kind of national hero.[56] The final lines of the film bring the familial telos of the work to completion, as Kovic says to an Asian–

55 Clark, 'Remembering Vietnam', p. 205.

56 Ibid., p. 203.

American woman reporter: 'We're home. I think maybe we're home.' Rather than a point of cultural resistance, the memory of Vietnam has in the film's closing scenes become a new way of reinstating family and home as the dominant fantasy and metaphor of national community.

In its appeal to national identity based on the metaphor of America as a maternal social body, and its concomitant shift away from masculinist concepts of nation, *Born on the Fourth of July* exhibits a striking combination of blindness and insight. Replete with stereotypical images of femininity, the film nevertheless places substantial pressure on myths of masculinity that equate nationalism with competition and aggression. In trying to forge a new model of masculine identity that can serve as the basis of a changed concept of nation, the film sets out a trajectory for its male protagonist that I believe may shed considerable light on the way masculinity is narrated and represented in films of the eighties and nineties. While film criticism has found in the Oedipal scenario a nearly universal pattern for depictions of masculine subjectivity in the cinema, the rescue fantasy, I feel, may be an equally important concept. In contrast to the Oedipal scenario, with its consistent emphasis on rebellion, competition and lack as necessary components of identity and desire, the rescue fantasy is shaped by a variety of emotions, including 'tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance, and independence', a range that gives the 'performance of the masculine', as it is commonly called today, a more balanced and complex character.[57] The shift from punitive concepts of masculine identity in the 'remasculinizing' narratives of the eighties to narratives that emphasize emotion and 'commitment' in the male-oriented films of the nineties might be analyzed not in terms of the fading of masculine authority but rather as an attempt to gain access to the paternal position, by way of the rescue fantasy, without incurring the fracturing penalties of Oedipal rivalry.

57 Freud, 'A special type of object choice', p. 173.

Nevertheless, the rescue fantasy remains a drama about power and powerlessness, and the organization of the fantasy, in its dominant version, around the figure of the woman who would be lost without the man's help, clearly represents a fantasy of control. As such, this scenario hardly provides a progressive basis for a new narrative of national cohesion. Still, there is a certain degree of reversibility in the roles of male and female characters in *Born on the Fourth of July* that we should not ignore. Kovic is himself 'rescued' several times in the film: from a morass of unfulfilled desire and self-pity by the Mexican prostitute; from corrosive guilt and self-loathing by Wilson's mother; and from physical danger, twice, by anonymous black men. In Freud's description of the fantasy, it appears that a certain reciprocity and role reversal is

inbuilt. The male child who wishes to rescue the mother is in effect reciprocating her, not just for the 'gift of life' but also for being 'rescued' by her from the dangers of birth: 'the act of birth itself is the danger from which he was saved by his mother's efforts. Birth is both the first of all dangers to life and the prototype of all the later ones.'[58]

58 Ibid., p. 173.

Despite this quality of reciprocity, however, the rescue fantasy itself is fraught with ambivalence towards the figure of the mother, a point that *Born on the Fourth of July* makes explicit. As Miriam Hansen writes about Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), 'the wish to be rescued revolves around the figure of the mother who, like Whitman's "fierce old mother" . . . has displaced a failing patriarchal lineage with an even greater threat of chaos and loss of identity'.[59] In similar fashion, the film's attempt to displace or revise the codes of masculine identity is ultimately limited and distorted by its use of maternal stereotypes as emblems of both division and community. Nevertheless, the prominence of the maternal figure in the film suggests that the theme of a 'failing patriarchal lineage' in Vietnam narratives may express itself not only through symbolic conflict with the father, but also through a more complex negotiation with the imaginary power of the mother.

59 Hansen, 'The hieroglyph and the whore', p. 191.

New South African cinema: *Mapantsula* and *Sarafina*

JACQUELINE MAINGARD

The film *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schmitz, 1988) was made when South Africa was in a state of emergency. The very fact that it was made is therefore of enormous historical significance but, added to this, its representations of that specific moment in South Africa also make it an important event for the cinema of South Africa. Having been fortunate enough to attend one of the three screenings permitted by the state's Publications Control Board (commonly known as the Censorship Board) in 1989,[1] and having experienced there the euphoric intensity of the small audience, present at what felt like the first truly South African film, it is easy to romanticize *Mapantsula*. I hope, however, in this paper to critique the film in a spirit that reflects some of that context, while moving beyond the critical naivete that such an experience can promote. I will also provide comparison of this film with *Sarafina* (Darrell James Roodt, 1991) – a film made in a very different context – and will then draw some conclusions on the issues which new South African cinema might face in the post 1990 period.

This analysis needs to be viewed against the backdrop of South Africa in the 1980s. The specific restrictions on filmmaking, film viewing and the distribution of films, linked with the plethora of apartheid laws oppressing opposition to the state, made the work of oppositional filmmakers a dangerous activity. In addition, the propaganda of the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) produced an extremely limited visual landscape of South African realities, while access to national broadcasting by oppositional groups was blocked. The film subsidy system run by the

1 These were permitted after the film had been banned, on appeal by the *Weekly Mail* Film Festival held at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

state was organized to prevent oppositional groups obtaining funds. For example, in the late 1980s a film script had to be passed by the Publications Control Board before a film subsidy would be considered. The two film distribution companies, Nu-Metro and Ster Kinekor, also played their part in maintaining the apartheid hegemony and blocked access to mainstream cinemas. Once a film was made it could not be viewed publicly before being passed by the Publications Control Board. Many films were 'banned' this way, thus adding to the bleakness of visual representations of the South African context that the majority of South Africans were experiencing but never seeing reflected in cinemas or on television screens. Against this background, the making of *Mapantsula* was extremely important and its ability to juxtapose black and white experience from a black perspective, as well as its focus on black opposition to the state, has earned it a special place in the history of oppositional cultural work.

Mapantsula locates itself specifically in the 1980s at the time of the rent boycotts in Soweto. The boycotts represented a way for communities to revolt against state oppression and expose the illegitimacy of the state's puppet urban councillors, at a time when all forms of demonstration carried severe penalties. Added to this, students were engaged in an ongoing school boycott while the schools themselves were occupied by the police and defence force. A state of emergency had been declared since 1985 which gave state forces virtual carte blanche to enforce control over any community or individual. State power was at its peak. This was the period when thousands of activists were detained for months on end without trial, when torture in detention was commonplace, when the 'necklacing' method of killing traitors, police spies and state puppets began, and when death row was filled with political activists. At this time the emergency media regulations were put in place and an eerie visual and aural silence descended upon the media – even state-owned television stopped broadcasting images of the real events taking place and those who had relied previously on aberrant readings of television news found even this avenue closed. This was the context in which *Mapantsula* was made and which it tried to represent.

The title of the film refers to a particular type of township gangster, represented by Panic[2] in the film, modelled on the Hollywood gangster of the 1950s – dressed in smart suits, with wide trouser legs, a stetson hat, and brogue shoes. The film is edited as a coherent interweaving of a dual narrative. While one narrative line develops Panic's experience in prison, the other describes the events leading up to his detention from his own point of view.[3] On the simplest level, the film deals with 'the relation of crime and politics'[4] so that Panic emerges as a kind of antihero, refusing to sign a statement that accuses Duma Sithole, union organizer and community activist, of being 'a known terrorist and agitator . . .

2 He is also called Johannes or Johnny by Stander, the police interrogator, and Themba by Ma Modise, from whom he rents a room.

3 There are also a few sequences in the film which develop the 'story' beyond Panic's perspective – events he would not have seen – but these are marginalized.

4 Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane, *Mapantsula Screenplay and Interview* (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1991), p. 42.

[and admitting to] . . . helping Sithole bring arms into the country and distributing them'.[5] On a more complex level, this interweaving of the film's two narratives permits a unique representation of the sociopolitical context of that time.

The complexities of community politics are exposed in the prison narrative through the relationship between Panic and his cellmates. He is a loner in the cell, an anomaly in the large crowd of chanting detainees, a gangster among community and political activists. There are a number of ways that the film makes this tension clear, one being the way Panic is dressed in his smart suit in comparison with his cellmates, who are wearing politically-orientated T-shirts;[6] another being the language differences between Panic and his cellmates – Panic speaks a slick street hybrid while his cellmates speak in the more careful, humanist tones of activists.

Community politics are also revealed through the focus on the rent boycotts. *Mapantsula* plays on this context in the sequence where the puppet mayor and his councillors attend the community meeting. By representing the crowd chanting and toyi-toying and highlighting the mayor's weakness, the film's ideological position is maintained. It is noteworthy that one of the reasons cited by the Publications Control Board for limiting screenings of the film was 'the reflection on councillors, namely that they exploit residents for personal gain, [having] further detrimental effects in the relationships between individuals and their local authorities'.[7]

The filmmakers also use the romantic threat that Duma poses to Panic to represent different positions in community politics. His girlfriend Pat is fired from her job and meets Duma, an activist and organizer for SADWA, the South African Domestic Workers Association. Where Panic is a streetwise, crude, aggressive and careless character, Duma is represented as serious, concerned, sensitive and a leader in the community. Thus, for Panic to say 'No!' to signing the false police statement at the end of the film gives him an integrity that inverts the naturalized view of gangsters. In this mix of 'crime and politics' Schmitz, the director, is attempting to make a unique point in South African cinema – provoking a new way for people to understand and locate themselves and each other in working against state repression and defying the 'usual' formulations of who may or may not be politically active. This is underlined by Schmitz when he says that: 'I wanted to make the film for the type of character depicted in the film . . . I thought that if the film could be seen in the downtown cheap bug-house cinemas . . . and seen by unemployed people, and tsotsis,[8] maybe the film could have some impact on them, and possibly change their lives'.[9]

But for some time this was not to be, for initially the film was banned. With the increasing openness in the media since the reformist approach of the National Party 'government', however, the film has since been unbanned and screened in mainstream cinemas

5 Ibid., p. 139.

6 For example T-shirts with the logo of the UDF (the United Democratic Front), a mass-based alliance of antiapartheid organizations established in 1983.

7 Quoted in Joyce Ozynski (ed.), *Film: What the Censors Think* (Johannesburg: Anti-Censorship Action Group, 1989), p. 10.

8 Loosely translated as 'township criminals'.

9 Schmitz and Mogotlane, *Mapantsula Screenplay and Interview*, p. 42.

and on the subscription television channel M-Net. In the years between its making and lifting of the ban, the power and value of video distribution for political ends was proven, since many copies of the video were made and viewed by an extraordinary range of groups all over the country, from community and student organizations to union meetings and street gatherings in both urban and rural communities.

Under apartheid the representation of race in the cinema is obviously a primary issue but, increasingly, gender issues are being placed on political and cultural agendas. In *Mapantsula*, the fact that Pat is a domestic worker is significant. This makes it possible for the film to move from the streets and homes of Soweto and the city streets of downtown Johannesburg to the affluent, white suburb where she works. Here, by stark contrast with the scenes of Soweto we see tree-lined streets with green verges, high walls, and remote control gates. Pat's position is useful for the development of the narrative and for the exposition of the differences in black and white life. She is nevertheless represented as a victim of Panic's abuse and furthermore as being dependent on Duma in demanding her rights. Even though she rejects Duma's offer to go with her to the 'madam', it is Duma who has told her what to do. The character of Ma Modise, is also represented through a stereotypical male point of view. Her son Sam is neither in school nor in employment, yet the domestic chores of the household are her responsibility. The way in which he and Panic banter with each other and ridicule her, is also stereotypically male.

Undoubtedly the film's value lies in the fact that it is made from the point of view of a black person. I make this point from a textual perspective since the script was co-written by a black man, Thomas Mogotlane, and a white man, Oliver Schmitz, and was directed by Schmitz. Like John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) however, while the film's text is representing a black view it is also a male view and the perspectives of black females are marginalized. In a scene that evokes the despair and alienation experienced by domestic workers this is underlined. Panic waits for Pat in her room at the 'madam's' house. She comes in and collapses exhausted onto the bed. As they converse about her request for more pay, in an over-shoulder shot from Panic's point of view, we look through the window at the silhouette of Pat's employers chatting and drinking from mugs. The shot makes manifest the alienation experienced by domestic workers, but although this is Pat's experience, textually it is Panic's point of view that is confirmed. It is *his* anger that is expressed and furthermore his frustration that is vented at Pat abusively: 'Hayi fuck you Pat! You must wake up man!'

There are moments however when Pat's perspective has a brief space in the film's centre, for example when we first see her in her employer's house. The black perspective of the film has already been established as primary, so the banality of the 'madam's' conversation and the irrelevance of her concerns in relation to Pat's experience is jarring. Furthermore in stereotyping her as a white 'madam' the film maintains its black perspective. This is further underlined when Pat returns for her overdue pay. A black woman dressed in the stereotypical attire of 'maid', silently walks across the background carrying a tea tray. Clearly, in terms of the sociopolitical context that the film is seeking to portray these scenes are important, but the potential to include a black female perspective is not developed. So while the film's strength lies in its representation of the sociopolitical context of the period, it is a black male perspective that dominates.

The film's focus on context is further confirmed by the way in which it is located on the streets of Johannesburg and Soweto, giving it a realistic quality with which audiences (at least urban ones) can identify. Panic as gangster inhabits the streets of Johannesburg – the hustle and bustle of city life, the streets, shops, eating places and bars are the places where he operates. In this sense the film draws on the gangster genre. But it does not attempt to present rounded, holistic characterizations; rather, because its task is to represent its sociopolitical context, its narrative and its realism is used for that purpose and not to provide a closed text. Thus the film ending as it does with Panic's 'No!' leaves the 'story' incomplete, its resolution depending on the engagement of the audience in the contemporary reality which the film exposes. The identification of audiences with Panic's response celebrates the resolve to resist the forces of apartheid at any cost.

To make some comparisons with *Sarafina* this film also locates itself in the sociopolitical context, beginning in 1976 when Soweto youth revolted against the use of Afrikaans as the instructional medium in their schools. Unlike *Mapantsula* it was made in 1992, outside the period it seeks to represent. This post 1990 context places its reception in a time of state reform, when the stop–start process of negotiations and the violence experienced throughout the country particularly on racial, ethnic and political levels has been debilitating and destructive. In addition, the film's commercial marketing and its reliance on a Hollywood star, Whoopi Goldberg, removes it from the context within which it places itself. The film also relies on significant figures in South African history such as Hugh Masekela (who created the score with Mbongeni Ngema) and Miriam Makeba (who plays Sarafina's mother). Both are popularly perceived as cultural and political 'martyrs' and spent many years in exile. Its

narrative depends on Mandela-as-hero who will bring freedom, yet reading the film after he has been released from prison in a period of chaos and violence, renders it mythical.

Sarafina is set in Morris Isaacson School in Soweto, the place from which the students began their historic march on 16 June 1976. But it is also in part set in the 1980s when the police and defence force occupied schools in the townships. So the film references its historical time as a conflation of the late 1970s and the 1980s to the extent that it rewrites this history for its own purposes. This is a contentious point since it can be argued that all history is interpreted. What is needed however is to find ways of validating popular conceptions of history without collapsing into nostalgic mythical solutions. As bell hooks suggests: there is a need for 'a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, and that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present'.[10]

This reading of the film is underlined by its style, which presents a pastiche of theatrical,[11] musical, and music video elements linked into a narrative that tells the story of Sarafina's worship of Mandela, her love for her teacher who dies in prison, her own imprisonment and release, and her wish come true – to play Nelson Mandela in the school concert. Linked to this narrative are themes expressing the anger of the youth and the violence of the police and defence force.

It has been suggested that despite the fact that *Sarafina* was directed by a white person, it is 'the real McCoy of black South African films'.[12] Certainly, like *Mapantsula*, it is filmed from the perspective of black people and black experience. Nevertheless, although Sarafina is female the film still privileges black male experience and a male gaze. Sarafina, for example, is not involved with her male friends in burning schools and urging the boycott of white businesses; rather she is the object of Crocodile's romantic desires. Similarly, she is desired by Sabela, the black policeman. Her beauty and desirability are confirmed by the camera's objectification of her face in closeup, underlined by her desperation to be a star.[13]

Like *Mapantsula*, the film uses the fact that Sarafina's mother is a domestic worker in a white suburb to juxtapose black and white contexts. Shots that are strongly reminiscent of Panic's bus ride lead Sarafina towards the house where her mother works. Here Sarafina's anger in relation to white affluence is revealed along with her abhorrence of her mother's servitude. Later, when she is released from detention she changes her views and approaches her mother less harshly. The song that Makeba then sings, as if on a stage and isolated from the film's plot, glorifies motherhood. Thus while *Mapantsula* and *Sarafina* approach the sociopolitical contexts they represent in different ways, they have similarities, particularly at the

10 bell hooks, 'Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness', *Framework*, vol. 36 (1989), p. 17.

11 The film script is based on the play created by Mbongeni Ngema in the late 1980s, and taken to Broadway after a first run in South Africa.

12 Sandile Dikeni, 'Sarafina! So beautiful. So sad', *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, no. 42 (1992/3), p. 33.

13 Note Dikeni's comment that 'beautiful, with lots of talent, [Leleti Khumalo] plays Sarafina with the charm that the role deserves . . .'. Ibid., p. 33.

level of privileging black male experience and marginalizing and stereotyping black female experience.

This examination of the two films at a textual and contextual level leads to the question of their place in relation to what I have called 'new South African cinema'. This not only proposes a break or shift with what came before but also suggests that there are films and cinema practices that might be labelled 'new' but which are 'merely novel'.[14] I borrow this phrase from Raymond Williams quite consciously since I am interested in cinema that is 'emergent' in his sense of the concept: cinema that represents and that attempts to discover the structures of feeling that if expressed might be called 'emergent'.

14 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 123.

In South Africa, categorizations of the 'new' are common at this time in the country's history and development, and the term 'the new South Africa' has been used and abused so extensively as to render it virtually indefinable. Debates about where and how the cinema might develop have been mostly at organizational, political and economic levels because these are the pressing ones, and aesthetic concerns have been largely marginalized. This paper itself tends to focus on the text in context. In addition, documentary film and video has been the focus in the last decade for a number of reasons: firstly there has been a need for documentaries in the development of unions and community organizations that counteract state representations of South African life in the mass media; secondly, news on South Africa has been particularly marketable through global television networks in the last decade; thirdly, video is cheaper to make and foreign funds have been more readily available to make oppositional documentaries that expose apartheid rather than fiction films.

In 1988, the Film and Allied Workers Organization (FAWO) was established to unite film workers against apartheid.[15] In the same period a Johannesburg newspaper, the *Weekly Mail* (now called the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*), began an annual film festival including a short film competition. This competition has generated some interest in fiction filmmaking. In identifying 'emergent' cinema however, the fact that access to 'the means of production' has been denied to the majority of the population through apartheid is of major significance. Thus fiction films (even short ones) have been made mostly by white people, and furthermore mostly by white men. The development of new South African cinema will need to engage strongly with this question of access, in terms of both race and gender.

15 After the 'Culture for another South Africa' conference held in Amsterdam, bringing together cultural workers from inside the country and from exile. At this conference different cultural sectors resolved to organize themselves.

One project that is attempting to do this is the Newtown Film and Television School (formerly the Community Video School) based in Johannesburg. Its beginnings were in a part-time project to train

aspirant black filmmakers in Alexandra township, on the strength of which funds were raised for the full-time school, primarily from Channel 4. The School has an affirmative action policy and gives preference to applicants who are black, female and who have community associations. In addition, the School is an educational project where issues such as access, and pedagogical principles and aesthetic concerns are debated and discussed, and it sees itself as playing a primary role in developing film education.

My earlier analyses of *Mapantsula* and *Sarafina* suggest that the area of aesthetic representation needs some attention. In relation to this, the School was established on the basis of the need for community-based film and video units to empower communities to create images of themselves from an interior perspective. From the outset the intention has been to develop new cinematic expressions with an authenticity and a local context that South African cinema has seldom seen. In addition, however, the concern is to develop cinema that will reflect developing consciousness in terms of identity, particularly in the representation of race and gender.

The theory and practice of Third Cinema in other parts of the world provides some background for the developments in the School and more broadly for identifying what new South African cinema might be. There are a number of levels to consider here, from the political and organizational to the representational and aesthetic. Since the country is in a time of transition, and the first election on the basis of one person, one vote is seemingly imminent, the energies of film and video workers organized in democratic structures have of necessity been largely committed to political and organizational concerns.

South African cinema needs to develop new approaches that are rooted in democratic practice and that begin to represent the complexity of South African experience. This is the challenge of the post 1990 period, when the battle lines are no longer clear and the brutalizing effects of apartheid are being exposed as never before. Here Homi Bhabha's note that black South Africans 'have not yet found their nation'[16] appears painfully naive where the very concept of 'nation', even at the most fundamental geographical level is powerfully contested. In this reality identity cannot depend on simply any representation of South African experience; rather, more complex ways of representing race, gender and location need to be explored. The potential conflict between such a development and the work to open up the mainstream to previously marginalized representations, will need to be monitored in this process. Claiming space in the centre is fraught with the possibility of being appropriated for purposes other than those intended. The differences between *Mapantsula* and *Sarafina* highlight this issue. On the one hand, *Mapantsula* is rooted within the urgency of resistance to state oppression while on the other, *Sarafina* uses the South

16 Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.

African context in what is essentially a commercial venture, and its value for new South African cinema is thus diminished.

Gabriel's conceptualization of Third Cinema as guardian of popular memory in opposition to official history[17] becomes a limited one in the face of the mammoth complexity of political transformation in South Africa. Not only are new cinema practices needed but also new cinema theories. The challenge of this waiting for the politically new, of this open cinematic space, of this empty theoretical moment, is to note our subjectivities in the hope that this 'gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world'.[18]

17 Teshome Gabriel, 'Third Cinema as guardian of popular memory: towards a third aesthetics', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 53–64.

18 hooks, 'Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness', p. 23.

A Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema

LAURA U. MARKS

Gilles Deleuze's books on cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, offer a complex logic of cinema as an exploration of consciousness. They are resources of new and productive ways to think about film and filmmaking. My intent in the following is to explore Deleuze's cinema theory as it may inform the project of hybrid cinema or experimental diasporan cinema.[1] I draw from the theories of hybridity put forward by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Hamid Naficy, and others, from Deleuze's work on Michel Foucault and with Félix Guattari, and from a critique of his use of Bergson. Most importantly, the film and video works I discuss in terms of Deleuze's film theory themselves offer an intervention in his work. I will look at a number of works in the genre of experimental diasporan cinema, focusing in particular on Rea Tajiri's videotape *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), John Akomfrah's film *Who Needs a Heart?* (1992), and Atom Egoyan's feature film, *Calendar* (1993).

In these writings the politics that characterize Deleuze's work elsewhere tend to go underground; perhaps disappear altogether. Tendencies such as his fascination with auteur cinema, while often pleasingly non-canonical, seem to inhibit the productive line of his thought. I intend my exploration of this one genre to make the political implications of Deleuze's film theory more explicit, by stressing the collective nature of the forms of memory and perception on which he bases his study.

What Deleuze calls 'time-image cinema' is, he argues, a revolutionary moment in the history of western philosophy, in which

1 This latter, awkward term is a placeholder for a diffuse genre that is approached by terms such as 'hybrid', 'multicultural', 'exile', 'postcolonial' or 'third cinema'. Debates over these terminologies and the different politics they engage are complex. See, for example: Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York and London: Verso, 1992); Ali Behdad, 'Traveling to teach: postcolonial critics in the American academy', in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (eds), *Race, Identity and Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 40–49; Coco Fusco, 'Stateless hybrids: an introduction', in Papo Colo and Coco Fusco (eds), *The Hybrid State* (New York: Exit Art, 1991); Faye Ginsburg, 'Indigenous media: Faustian contract or global village?', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991); Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37; Hamid Naficy, 'The cultural politics of hybridity', in Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel, 'Introduction – consuming the other', *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992), pp. i–iii; Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the post-colonial', *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992), pp. 99–113.

it has become possible to make an autonomous image of time. It is distinct from 'movement-image cinema', in which frame follows frame according to necessities of action, subordinating time to movement. In order to derive the revolutionary potential of the new cinema that provides a direct image of time, Deleuze places great importance upon the 'any-spaces-whatever' that came to proliferate after World War II: 'The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were "any-spaces-whatever", deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers.'[2]

Could it be that these are not simply the disjunctive spaces of postmodernism but also the disruptive spaces of postcolonialism; the return of repressed cultural presences to the spaces that had marginalized them? In this case the 'kind of mutant . . . new race' to which Deleuze refers (in terms that suddenly take on a rather xenophobic cast) describes the very real conditions of migration, diaspora and hybridity that characterize the new populations of Europe and North America in the years since the war.

Theories of hybrid cinema argue that a hybrid form, in which autobiography mediates a mixture of documentary, fiction, and experimental genres, characterizes the film production of people in transition and cultures in the process of creating identities.[3] One defining quality of hybrid, or experimental diasporan, films is that they are necessarily produced in a contentious relation to a dominant language: in this sense they are properly termed a *minority* form. The violent spatiotemporal disjunctions that characterize diasporan experience – the physical effects of exile, immigration and displacement – also cause a rupture in notions of truth. Experimental diasporan films, using basically western film forms to speak from nonwestern cultures to a mixed audience, perform this disjunction. They have an archaeological quality that allows it to pose different regimes of truth against each other. They confound official history, private recollection and simple fiction, and point to the lacunae that remain, refusing to be filled by the truth of any of these. I use Deleuze's notions of an archaeology of the image to argue that in experimental postcolonial cinema different orders of image, or image and soundtracks that do not correspond to each other, express the disjunction between official and private memory. In addition, if Deleuze's understanding of perception is traced back to its borrowing from Bergson, these disjunctions within the sense information offered by a film can evoke other sorts of memory that slip from dominant discourse, namely memories encoded in senses other than auditory and visual.

2 Gilles Deleuze, 'Preface to the English edition', *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. xi.

3 See, for example: Fusco; Naficy; Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Kobena Mercer, 'Diaspora culture and the dialogic imagination: the aesthetics of black independent filmmaking in Britain', in Claire Andrade Watkins and Mbye B. Cham (eds), *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives in Black Independent Cinema* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988), pp. 50–61. See also: Peter Hitchcock, 'The othering of cultural studies', *Third Text*, no. 25 (1993/4) for a critique of a definition of hybrid cinema that I propose in 'Of many one: the hybrid state films', *Black Film Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1992), pp. 10–11; 26–7.

Deleuze's concern in his *Cinema* books is not to come up with another film theory; rather, film is the ideal object for his philosophical project. In the introduction to *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* he asserts that he is carrying out an exploration that Bergson would have done, except that cinema did not attain its typical form until after the philosopher's death. Cinema, he argues, is an exploration of consciousness.[4] Hence the bricolage of philosophical languages in these books. Similarly, my concern in using this package of theory is not to find just another way of talking about critical filmmaking, nor to 'apply' Deleuze to a cinematic object. Rather, if cinema is an exploration of consciousness, then these theories must be able to address the production and suppression of consciousness in cinema.

4 Gilles Deleuze, 'Preface to the French edition', *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. xiv.

Destratification

Discourses are not only restrictive but enabling.[5] While they limit what can be said, they also provide the only language in which to say it. One may be tempted to interpret the powers of becoming or 'lines of flight' that would cut through the layers of accumulated discourse as forces of truth, but they can only be productive if they participate in these discourses. 'Relations between forces will remain transitive, unstable, faint, almost virtual, unless they are carried out by the formed or stratified relations which make up forms of knowledge.'[6] In other words, political (or any sort of) change must be effected in a dance, between strata and lines of flight, of containment and breaking free.

5 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

6 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 74.

Similarly, Deleuze's work on cinema, like Foucault's work on history, disputes the ability ever to find the truth of a historical event. It is lost in its discursive representation, in the layers of words and things that build up over it. Yet it is only by being inscribed in this way that it can be said to occur at all. We can recreate, not the true historical event, but at least another version of it, by cutting across those discursive layers. 'If we want to grasp an event we must not show it', Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2*. 'We must not pass along the event, but plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history (and not simply a more or less distant past).'[7] This is the act of archaeology: combining elements from different strata in order to resist the order that would be imposed by working on one stratum alone.[8] Cinema has the unique ability to deterritorialize the representation of a historical event, to confront the layers with each other and sort through the rubble.

7 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 254–55.

8 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 503.

For example: *Who Needs a Heart?*, a film by John Akomfrah of the Black Audio Film Collective, cuts through the discursive representation of the Black Power movement in Britain in the 1960s

and 1970s. The cliched image of those struggles is present in clothing, hairstyles, parties and slogans on protest signs. However, the absence of dialogue in the entire film prevents the viewer from easily connecting those visual images with official representations of the movement; representations that contain and dismiss it. Instead, music, ambient sound, and an almost perfume-like richness of colour and texture cause the film to elicit recollections on another level – one that circumvents official discourse. *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*, a video by Rea Tajiri, confronts the hegemonic representations of Japanese–Americans during World War II in fiction films and government newsreels with images of absence, forgetting and evocative trifles that ultimately speak volumes. And *Calendar*, a film by Atom Egoyan, confronts a tourist's commodified images of Armenia with incoherent memory-images from which a profoundly repressed grief erupts.

Archaeology of the film image

Following Foucault, Deleuze argues that the visual and verbal are different orders that cannot be reduced one to the other. They are two incommensurable forms of truth that confront each other at a given historical moment: 'What we see never lies in what we say, and vice versa'.[9] They approach each other asymptotically, falsifying each other even as they require each other. Cinema, as an audiovisual medium, is the privileged record of the disjunctive quality of 'truth' in a particular historical formation. Deleuze understands the cinematic image to correspond to the Foucauldian notion of the visible, the layer of things in which one can read about a particular stratum or historical formation. In the image is revealed 'the deserted layer where we bury our own phantoms'.[10] (Later I will argue that in addition to these two orders of experience there exist still other, less easily recorded and coded, orders that nevertheless leave their traces in the audiovisual media of film and video.) Pedagogy, for Deleuze, is the act of revealing the new layer that is in formation, the new combination of words and things that cannot be read in terms of the existing languages. To read/hear the image, then, is to look/listen not for what is there but for the gaps – 'mind the gap!', as notices read in the subways – to look for what might be, in the face of what is not. Films that are hybrid, in that they are forced to use hegemonic languages to speak from positions of diaspora, take advantage of this disjunction between the visual and the verbal. Hence the importance of black screen, the *absence* of image, in *History and Memory*; of barely legible 8mm video footage and distorted voices on an answering machine in *Calendar*.

History and Memory attempts to recreate Tajiri's Japanese–American family's memory of their internment in concentration

9 Ibid., p. 64.

10 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 244.

camps during World War II. The tape is both the record and active process of her struggle to reactivate the past from the fragments of available image. Images exist, in newsreels and fictions films, to corroborate official histories of the internment of Japanese-Americans during the war. But the unofficial histories of her family's experiences cannot be documented, and the few artifacts they have from the experience are silent. Furthermore, inexplicably for Tajiri, those who were in the camps seem wilfully amnesiac; her mother barely remembers a thing about her imprisonment. It is by bringing together visual and audio images that are inadequate alone and contradictory together that Tajiri is able to evoke scenes and events that cannot be reconstructed.

The tape begins with a black screen, and a scrolling text describing a scene viewed from overhead:

> . . . Slowly, very, very slowly the ground comes closer as the tops of trees disappear. The tops of the heads of a man and woman become visible as they move them back and forth in an animated fashion. The black hair on their heads catch and reflect light from the street lamps. The light from the street lamps has created a path for them to walk and argue.
> *(The spirit of my grandfather witnesses my father and mother as they have an argument about the unexplained nightmares of their daughter on the 20th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor . . .)*

. . . an event that would result in the forcible detainment of 110,000 Japanese-Americans. This description of an image (with no image) is followed by another, this time verbal. Tajiri's voiceover says:

> I don't know where this came from, but I just have this fragment, this picture that's always in my mind. My mother, she's standing at a faucet, and it's really hot outside, and she's filling this canteen, and the water's really cold, and it feels really good. And the sun's just so hot, it's just beating down, and there's this dust that gets everywhere, and they're always sweeping the floors.

This second description is accompanied by a brief flash of a visual image, of a dark-haired woman filling a canteen. These two sequences, detailed descriptions of events for which there are no images, attempt to replace the images that have 'happened in the world while there were cameras watching', or which 'we restage in front of cameras, to have images of'. They must suffice, for none of the contemporary images – Office of War Information films of the camps, American and Japanese newsreels, or movies like *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) – can serve as memory vehicles for Tajiri's family. Tajiri calls upon the spirit of the dead, namely her grandfather, to supply an image, as though the recollection of a community must be drawn upon as a source of images when no

Surname Viet Given Name Nam **(Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 1989). Courtesy: Cinenova.**

others exist. In short, when no image is available, archaeology must be done in order wilfully to create images.

Images also become a site for excavation when the sound ceases to corroborate them. Trinh T. Minh-ha, for example, has long worked to make sound falsify the visual archive. In Trinh's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) the audio/visual disjunction consists in realizing, as several women talk on camera about their experiences of growing up in Vietnam, that they are performing themselves. Their hesitation on camera is not 'Asian' shyness but the uncertainty of under-rehearsed actors. As their words simultaneously scroll down the screen, one begins to doubt the women's statements, which have the quality of confessions extracted under torture (or by a filmmaker anxious to capture authenticity). Cut off from their cliched extension into conventional documentary forms, the visual and sound images become unavailable to the viewer who seeks some sort of authenticity. They underscore the limitations of a film language that insists on examination and truthful revelation.

Other filmmakers divorce the visual from the verbal archive by eschewing full translation into English (or the language of the dominant viewer). Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva Jr exhibits many of his works in Hopi with either no translation or a clearly incomplete one. In *Siskyavi: The Place of Chasms* (1991), an old woman explains to her granddaughter, in alternating Hopi and English, the significance of the ceremonial patterns she is painting. A non-Hopi will comprehend that what she is describing is sacred; but the sacred elements of her speech are not translated; they reside on a different, inaccessible stratum from that on which the English conversation takes place.

Similarly, Egoyan's *Calendar* is structured around the losses that take place in acts of translation. The protagonist (played by the filmmaker) is a photographer whose mode of existence is to replace experience with images. We watch as this character, who like Egoyan is a Canadian photographer of Armenian descent, manages the experience of being in his country of origin by creating images for export. His reason for being in Armenia is to produce photographs of country churches, turning the rustling, fragrant landscape into cheesecake images to be marketed in the West. His wife is a Canadian who still identifies with her Armenian heritage (played by Egoyan's real-life wife, Arsinée Khanjian). In the course of their visit she comes to identify more with the country they are visiting and to become attracted to their native Armenian guide. As though already in thrall to these images with which he is replacing his own presence, the photographer watches through the viewfinder as she disappears into the landscape with the guide, knowing he is losing her to him.

These flashbacks alternate with scenes in which the photographer, back in his Toronto apartment, pursues his perversion of hiring

Arsinée Khanjian in Atom Egoyan's *Calendar* (1993). Courtesy: ICA Projects.

women who vaguely resemble his wife to come to dinner, excuse themselves on cue, and make an erotic telephone call in their first language, such as Macedonian or Turkish. As the woman-of-the-moment stands next to the church-of-the-month, talking on the phone, they function as two virtual images, of the woman and the country he refused to see.

Actual and virtual image

Drawing on Bergson's philosophy of duration, Deleuze proffers an image of time as always splitting, like a hair, into two parts: the time that moves smoothly forward, or the 'present that passes'; and the time that is seized and represented (if only mentally), or the 'past that is preserved'. What Deleuze, following Bergson, refers to as the actual image and the virtual image are the two aspects of time as it splits, the actual corresponding to the present that passes, the virtual to the past that is preserved. Thus we see that at the very moment that they diverge, the two types of image create two disjunctive representations of the same moment. ('Image' in Bergson signifies not simply the visual image, but the complex of impressions that a perceived object conveys to a perceiver at a given moment.)[11] An example is home videos of family gatherings. At the moment that the video is shot, the two sorts of time look the same, but the present-that-passes can never be recalled, while the past-that-is-preserved (in the video) becomes the institutionalized representation of the moment. Virtual images tend to compete with recollection images – the memory you have of the gathering that is not captured in the video – and as we know, the power of the former is such that they often come to stand in for our memories.

In effect, the past-that-is-preserved has hegemony over the representation of the event, be it Thanksgiving 1994 or Gulf War 1991. If instead of home movies we think of television news, for example, the political implications of these divergent sorts of image become apparent. Clearly this is not a question of which image is 'true', but of which has a more tenacious representation, and which representation has more continuity with the layer of images that preceded it. Television, cinema and other 'public' images comprise a sort of official history, while the unpreserved present-that-passes is more like unofficial history or private memory. To confront one with the other is to dig between the strata – perhaps finding traces of unofficial or private memories. What Deleuze calls a 'recollection image' embodies a past event that has no match in the recent image repertoire: Tajiri's image of her mother at the pump is an example.

Experimental diasporan cinema digs between strata, using a mixture of filmic languages to tell the unofficial stories of exile, emigrant, or culturally-mixed people. Where multicultural categorizing keeps difference in its place, hybridity is unpredictable and generative. When someone's experience does not fit into the categories provided, it brings back the histories that are repressed – just as a fossilized fragment visibly recalls the forgotten struggles of past generations. Hybrids reveal the process of exclusion by which nations and identities are formed.

Part of this archaeological quality depends upon a certain arresting of movement. The films I discuss here tend to hold the

11 See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988), pp. 36–8.

viewer in a series of evocative contemplations, where exploration is spatial more than temporal, or where the temporality is located in the circuits of memory rather than the forward motion of action.[12]

12 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 46.

Memory

Images are not neutral reflections, but representations made from an interested point of view. Perception, according to Bergson, is always partial and interested, since it is located in a specific perceiver; it is necessarily embodied, located, and contingent. Subjectivity, then, is *subtractive* insofar as it means a thing is not perceived in its fullness but only in those aspects that interest the perceiver.[13]

Part of what distinguishes the movement image from the time image is that the former accepts the subjectivity implied in the image; it acquiesces to the hegemonic form of perception. 'It could be said', Deleuze writes, 'that the subjective-image is the thing seen by someone "qualified", or the set as it is seen by someone who forms part of that set'.[14] The time image – which should evoke a naked eyeball, powerless to draw upon its resources of memory and common sense – questions everything about how *this* image got to be constructed from a given perception, and thus has to start the act of perceiving all over again. In fact, Deleuze argues, cinema necessarily pulls the viewer between subjective and objective poles, much as in Bakhtinian linguistics each act of enunciation positions the listener/viewer anew.[15]

Egoyan has made a number of feature films devoted to the question of how technological reproductions of images are used as prostheses for memory and for sex. His films centre on the destruction of virtual images, such as family photos and home movies, themselves already the last vestige of memory. These images often also represent the memories of a minority culture. In Egoyan's early film *Family Viewing* (1987), for example, the only remaining images of the young protagonist's Armenian mother, who is dead, are home movies that, having been transferred to video, have already lost resolution. The boy's father, an Anglo-Canadian (who we see on a fragment of one of the films discouraging his wife from speaking to their son in her native language), is now recording sexual games with his mistress over the family videotapes. Pornography is, in some ways, characterized by the reduction of a presence to a deracinated and consumable image: hence the convergence of cultural erasure and the production of pornography in many of Egoyan's works. Yet these images remain volatile, threatening to activate buried circuits of memory.

13 Ibid., pp. 63–4.

14 Ibid., p. 71.

15 Deleuze touches briefly upon the notion of film as 'utterable' from Bakhtinian linguistics to critique the bifurcation of subjectivity and objectivity in film spectatorship, arguing that since there are no positions of objectivity within discourse, cinema necessarily deterritorializes subjectivity. Ibid., p. 73. Identification in film, according to this model, is not with a subject but with the act of perception. David Pendleton has recently demonstrated that the Deleuzo-Guattarian model of a subjectivity that is constituted in the vicissitudes of a productive desire makes this sort of identificatory oscillation the norm. See: David Pendleton, 'Beyond subject and object ', paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies conference, Syracuse, 1994. For an excellent discussion of how Bakhtinian semiotics allow film to be understood as encoding a social process, as opposed to the more abstract and individualistic tradition of Saussurean semiotics, see Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 31–4.

Fossils

Deleuze remarks that many films made by minorities invoke memory – neither a psychological nor a collective memory, but 'the strange faculty that puts into immediate contact the inside and the outside, the people's business and private business'.[16] Because official histories, with their official image repertoires, are often at odds with the private histories of disenfranchised people, it is recollection images – such as the memories of Tajiri's interlocutors – that must confront the public and the private with each other.

16 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 221.

A recollection image is like a fossil in that it embodies the traces of events whose representation has been buried. When recollection images cannot be connected to a present situation, they become 'strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous'.[17] Such traces are inscrutable on their own, but when we cut through the different layers and connect them, they tell a story. *History and Memory* evokes recollection images, fossils of events that have left traces in the memories and forgettings of Tajiri's parents and the other people she interviews.

17 Ibid., pp. 112–13.

Tajiri tells of a bird-shaped wooden brooch that her amnaesiac mother wore constantly, made by a now-dead relative. One day in the National Archives, going through a box of documents from the internment camps, Tajiri comes across a photograph of a roomful of people working at long tables, labelled 'Bird-carving class, August 1941'. The archive – in this case, the literal archive – does not recognize Mrs Tajiri's private history, but it can tell something about it. Similarly, the bird activates the archive, embodying a recollection that is now lost. The brightly-painted figure, a node to which both official and private histories can be traced, is one of those 'strangely active fossils'.

Cliche

The archaeological power of the cinema is its ability to mine images for new information. Deleuze writes, 'It is a civilization of the cliche where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image'. The cliche is 'a sensory-motor image of the thing', an image of this thing that is not seen for itself but only instrumentally.[18] In contrast to the cliche, Deleuze values what he calls the optical image. He usefully invokes Eadweard Muybridge's famous experiments with racehorses to illustrate the difference between cliche and optical image. The cliche is that classic image of a galloping horse, all four legs off the ground and gracefully extended. The optical image is any of those instantaneous shots that

18 Ibid., pp. 20–21.

Muybridge captured that revealed the horse in all its ungainly untypicality. Not how you imagine a horse in full gallop looks! Released from a *pose*, with its implicit extension into action, the uncliched image depicts an *any-instant-whatever*.[19]

19 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

The optical image 'replaces its objects', substituting a virtual for an actual image; not the thing, but a description that replaces and erases the thing. Cinema, in severing cliches from their context, makes the hidden object visible, in Foucault's sense of revealing what knowledge they constitute. The resulting image (described with examples from Godard and Antonioni) *looks* rarefied and abstract compared to the richness of cliched images. But it is really the cliche that is abstract: it uses from the image only what makes sense in the terms of causal connections, instrumentally; and this exists on a conceptual level. As Deleuze puts it, 'It is grass in general that interests the herbivore'![20] By contrast, the restraint and thinness of the optical image 'bring the thing each time to an essential singularity, and describe the inexhaustible, endlessly referring to other descriptions. It is, then, the optical image which is really rich, or "typical".'[21]

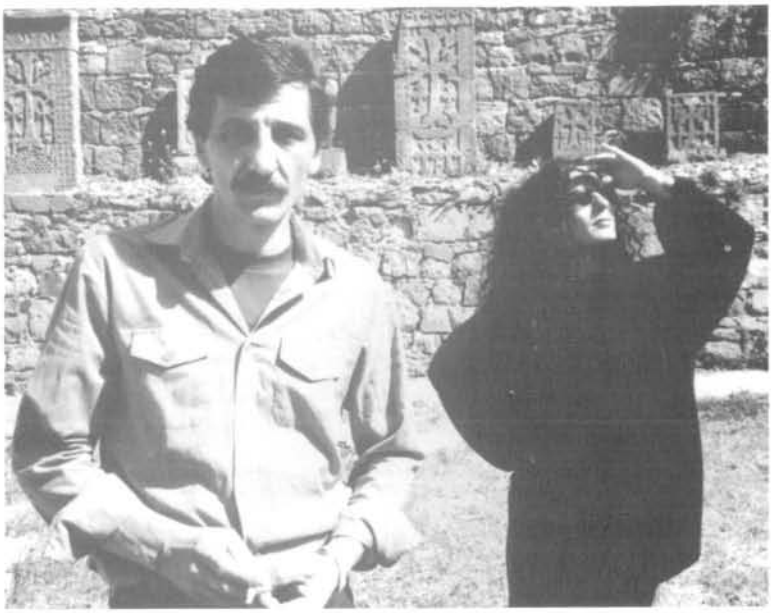
20 Ibid., p. 44.

21 Ibid., p. 45.

Empty of already-encoded meanings, the optical image is open to reapprehension and the reactivation of memory. We do not perceive such an image purely in the phenomenological sense, but rather our 'attentive recognition' comes into play. Attentive recognition is a Bergsonian term for the way we oscillate between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to mind, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us. In so doing we create anew, 'not only the object perceived, but also the ever-widening systems with which it may be bound up'.[22] Engaging with the freshly perceived object, we recreate it in higher expansions of memory and on deeper strata of reality. The emptied-out cliche is one example of failed recognition, with its possibilities for rediscovering lost virtual and recollection images. For example, this describes the form of viewership at work in *Who Needs a Heart?*, since the lack of narrative and of dialogue encourages the viewer to linger on music, visual elements, and details of mise-en-scene, calling upon his or her own subjective experience to amplify the clues given in the film.

22 Ibid., p. 46. Deleuze is quoting Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 127–8.

In *Calendar*, the protagonist is someone who is desperately trying to speed the process of replacing actual images with virtual images. Afraid of the volatility of recollection images and their ability to activate repressed pain, he rigorously controls the process of image construction, as though to speed actual images into their suspension in virtual images. He spends the entire trip to Armenia fixed behind the viewfinder of an 8mm camera, while his wife and her guide and erstwhile lover wander in and out of the frame. When she translates the guide's information to the photographer, she conveys his disapproval as well: 'He doesn't like to tell about this place – he



'He doesn't like to tell you about this place ... you should let your eyes discover it'. *Calendar* (Atom Egoyan, 1993). Courtesy: ICA Projects.

thinks you should let your eyes discover it'. Arsinée tries to convince him to leave his camera and join them for a walk but the photographer is adamant, adding in a retrospective voiceover, 'What I really feel like doing is standing here and watching while the two of you leave me and disappear into a landscape that I am about to photograph'. He defers acknowledging the loss of his marriage, instead wilfully creating images that, should he ever let down his guard and experience them, will awaken painful circuits of memory. Thus the glossy calendar on his wall in Toronto is, to push the metaphor, a mine of radioactive fossils.

The photographer's life revolves around similar processes of substitution. His substitutions are highly fetishistic both in psychoanalytic terms and in the sense that he is seeking to establish a uniform commodity value for all his experiences. His wife's voice, calling long distance, echoes metallically on his answering machine. The women who come to him from the escort service barely resemble his wife. He 'adopts' a child in Armenia and watches a videotape of her. 'She costs me $28 a month', he tells one of his paid dinner companions: 'Do you have children? How much do they cost a month?'

By their very inadequacy to the actual image, these virtual images set up circuits of memory and longing. This is the trap the photographer sets for himself, and the trap of the optical image. The less that is there in the image, pre-encoded – 'pre-enjoyed' in the second-hand store euphemism – the more there is that can only be

experienced by drawing upon one's memories as one engages with the image in the present act of perception.

Significantly, when attentive recognition fails – when we cannot remember – it creates. Rather than hooking up with sensory-motor extension, the actual image connects with virtual elements.[23] Attentive recognition is thus a *participatory* notion of spectatorship, whose political potential shouldn't be ignored. If a viewer is free to draw upon her own reserves of memory as she participates in the creation of the object on screen, her private and unofficial histories and memories will be granted as much legitimacy as the official histories that make up the regime of the cliche – if not more. How this process of spectatorship connects with a process of production is another matter, related to the notion of 'intercessors' that I introduce below.

23 Ibid., p. 55.

Memory and the collective

In focusing on diasporan cinema, I have been describing a crisis of incommensurability in which there is a directly political question of the discrepancy between official and private memories. Deleuze describes such a crisis in his discussions of European and North American cinema as well. Here the terms of the crisis are more existential – the helplessness of Antonioni's and Godard's characters confronting strange industrial landscapes, for example; or the free-floating perception that characterizes work of North American structuralist filmmakers such as Michael Snow and Ken Jacobs. The latter, Deleuze argues, formulate a sort of *gaseous* perception that is not tied to subjectivity, but also not tied to any collectivity. Gaseous perception affords not a Vertovian communist utopia but an individualistic one, or, as Deleuze writes, 'Drugs as the American community':[24] it's a gas!

24 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 84.

Deleuze's theory of cinematic perception should allow him to quite accurately trace the form of the viewing community in the object viewed. Instead he falls into an atomistic notion of perception in which the individual *can* perceive without the assistance of collective memory. I would like to argue, in contrast to this position, that the element of communal experience implicit in Bergson's theory of perception necessarily informs the process of film perception as well. 'Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past'.[25] As Teshome Gabriel points out, the process of viewing of Third Cinema works underscores the collective character of their expression: 'there is a significant continuity between forms of oral tradition and ceremonial story-telling and the structures of reception of Third Cinema. This continuity consists of a sharing of responsibility in the construction

25 Walter Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 157.

of the text, where both the filmmaker and the spectators play a double role as performers and creators.'[26] This collective process, I argue, is simply more explicit, and motivated, in diasporan cinema, which is forced to recognize individualistic narratives to be aspects of hegemonic fictions. Minority media make it clear, by virtue of their strained relation to dominant languages, that *no* utterance is individual.

Let me draw upon Walter Benjamin's critique of Bergson in order to refashion some of Deleuze's ideas about film, memory, and the social. Bergson's notion of *durée*, which is central to Deleuze's theory of time-image cinema, depends upon a person experiencing the passage of time. As Benjamin points out, however, Bergson elides the fact that this experience ends in the individual's death. 'Bergson in his conception of the durée has become . . . estranged from history', Benjamin writes. 'The durée from which death has been eliminated has the miserable endlessness of a scroll. Tradition has been excluded from it.'[27] This endlessness and estrangement seem distinctly to describe the sort of high-modernist cinema that Deleuze privileges. Such works actualize the experience of the *durée* by not permitting images to extend into action, by cutting off all causal relationships. The wandering character of a Godard film 'has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer's problem becomes "What is there to see in the image?" (and not now "What are we going to see in the next image?")'[28] But, we might ask, what is the point of 'finally SEEING' if there is nothing to see? What is the point of having our cliches and preconceptions blown by the intensity of the time-image experience if we have no subsequent course of action; if, indeed, the time image is all about suspending action? Might there be a more pressing purpose to this act of suspension?

To answer this, let me return to explore the idea of memory. Memory is more like a productive minefield (or bed of fossils) than the limpid reflecting pool that Bergson describes. Benjamin finds Bergson excessively sanguine about an individual's ability to partake in the fullness of experience, moving back and forth between the circuits of perception and recollection with ever-increasing satisfaction, as though at some great phenomenological buffet table. Experience, he argues, necessarily involves a connection with the social character of memory, and this relation is increasingly difficult where the social character of public life has been undermined. Benjamin's critique suggests that among the sorts of causal relationships abjured in the time image is ritual. Ritual depends upon the association of images with history, of individual with community experience. Collective memory comes as a shock: *mémoire involontaire* is not simply the individual unconscious bucking up, but the traces of collective life that inform the structure of perception.

26 Teshome H. Gabriel, 'Third cinema as guardian of popular memory: towards a Third aesthetics', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p. 62.

27 Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', p. 185. Benjamin does note however that Bergson had specific interest in rejecting the historical determination of memory (ibid., p. 157).

28 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 272.

Benjamin aligns Bergson's idea of *mémoire pure* with the notion of unconscious memory. Both describe the sort of memory that cannot be called up at will but must be brought on by a 'shock' – whether this be the fragrance of Proust's *tisane* or, for Deleuze, the immobility that forces one to see. Unlike remembrance, Benjamin writes, (unconscious) memory aims not to protect impressions but to disintegrate them.[29] Remembrance actually shields consciousness from experience. It is thus very much like the built-up layers of virtual images that comprise official history. In contrast, memory, one might say, deterritorializes remembrance. It takes a shock to unroot a memory, to create a flow of experience. Such a shock is what Deleuze looks for in time-image cinema. What you 'SEE', then, in the suspension of motor extension, is a little closer to the repressed *collective* contents of memory than simply a phenomenological Thereness.

29 Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', pp. 159–60.

Sense memory

Let me stress that this memory is not simply individual repressed memory, but a cultural memory. I have been arguing that the memories that are effaced from dominant representations find their representation in the characteristic gaps of time-image cinema. I would like to suggest as well, following Bergson, that the very perceptual forms that encode memory may be revealed as culturally contingent by this shattering effect. The 'shattering of the sensory-motor schema' that characterizes time-image cinema describes a suspension of the usual relations among the senses and their automatic extension into movement. This shattering thus intervenes into the commonsense patterns of sense experience, leaving some space in which perception can be experienced anew. (It is interesting to reconsider the notion of 'common sense' in terms of Bergson's theory of perception: a particular organization of the senses is held in common as the way a particular culture perceives.) Put differently, the suspension unsettles hegemonic forms of perception, creating space for culturally variant forms of perception. Bergson emphasizes that perception takes place in a body (not, for example, a point of consciousness), that the senses act as a whole in the act of recognition, and that the senses 'require education'.[30]

30 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 48.

These arguments support a view that sense experience is learned. It is important to note that in his use of the term 'image' Bergson implies not simply a visual image but the whole of sense information available to a (differentially disposed) perception at a given time. *Matter and Memory* can lend itself to an explanation of the cultural variations by which the senses are differentiated and hierarchized, and thus to reread Bergson's work closely allows us to see what might be revealed between the falling shards that Deleuze's

'shattering' precipitates. Since perception in his model is plastic and instrumental, variable according to culture and local need, I would suggest that it provides a way to theorize relations of perception and memory as they are specifically informed in different cultures. The 'tactile' is one such component of sense memory. As the story 'bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand',[31] so does film encode the sense memories that do not find their way into verbal discourse. Deleuze offers the example of the pickpocket's hands in Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959) to demonstrate how tactile perception might function in film.[32] I would suggest that tactile (and other sense) memories are most important to those who do not have access to conventional speech in film. Hamid Naficy writes that it is especially important to consider the non-audiovisual ways that exiles experience audiovisual media: 'The exiles produce their difference not just through what they see and hear but through their senses of smell, taste, and touch. Indeed, these aspects of the sensorium often provide, more than sight and hearing, poignant reminders of difference and of separation from homeland.'[33]

31 Benjamin 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', p. 164

32 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 12

33 Naficy, 'The cultural politics of hybridity', pp. 152–3.

The originary fossil-like image in *History and Memory* – the image that encodes lost memories – is that of the woman filling the canteen at a pump. It is Tajiri, reenacting her mother's sole memory from the internment camps. The second time the image plays, as the woman kneels in the dust, we hear the sound of water splashing; she rinses her face with a grimace of relief, as though this visit to the pump were her only respite from the days of imprisonment, dust and waiting. Her mother's only memory, then, is a *tactile* memory,

***History and memory* (Rea Tajiri, 1991). Courtesy: Jane Balfour Films Ltd.**

of the heat rising and the coolness of water on her hands and face. The film alludes to this level of perception through image and, especially, the gurgling sound of the running water: the memory is encoded audiovisually. The space that is beyond discourse in *History and Memory* is also one that the colonizing images of the US newsreels could not touch: a private sense memory, held in safe keeping.

Powers of the false

Deleuze's politics can be summarized without too much simplification as privileging that which enables the new to come into being. This principle underlies his desire to argue ways in which the time image may supersede the movement image, insofar as the former represents already-dead discourse and the latter the freedom from fixed discourse that enables new perceptions. These politics align with the various politics of diasporan cinema in the most general sense that diasporan peoples are people in the process of transformation, whose self-expression is impossible within hegemonic discourse. Thus the power for people in the process of becoming is the 'power of the false', an assertion that will not privilege *their* experience as truth either, only undermine the hegemonic character of official images, cliches, and other totalizing regimes of truth. Powers of the false capture the fraught relationship with dominant languages that groups have when they are emerging into political identity. John Akomfrah upholds such a will to transformation when he criticizes the imperative that black cultural workers submit to particular political ends: 'People assume that there are certain transcendental duties that Black filmmaking has to perform. . . . Because it is in a state of emergence its means always have to be guerrilla means, war means, signposts of urgency. When that begins to inhibit questions of reflection – doubt, skepticism, intimacy and so on – then the categorical imperative does exactly what it is supposed to do – it imprisons.'[34] In contrast, creative falsification at the level of the image itself can have political power.

In the cinema, 'powers of the false' are at work when there is no single point that can be referred to as real or true. Recall that in our forking model of time, of present-that-passes and past-preserved, there can be no objective record of the past. The past is preserved among various discursive strata that confront each other with incommensurable truths. Power of the false describes the indiscernibility between actual and virtual images constituted around the splitting of time. Deleuze calls the complex of such indiscernible images a 'crystal-image': the original point at which real and virtual image reflect each other produces, in turn, a widening circuit of real and virtual images like a hall of mirrors. 'Sometimes it is the film

34 John Akomfrah, quoted in Coco Fusco, 'An interview with the Black Audio Film Collective: John Akomfrah, Reece Augiste, Lina Gopaul and Avril Johnson', *Young British and Black: The Work of Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective* (Buffalo: Hallwalls, 1988), p. 51.

which takes itself as its object in the process of its making or of its setbacks in being made', Deleuze notes, that acts as this sort of catalytic crystal, reflecting its could-have-beens in the complex of its virtual images.[35] *Calendar*, *Who Needs a Heart?*, and *History and Memory* are constructed around the setbacks that block them: the events that prevent the production of images stimulate circuits of memory. To recall the image of fossil that I borrow from Deleuze's writing on Foucault, these points across which virtual and actual regard each other actually function as fossils, preserving the 'radioactive' quality of the original contact.

35 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 76.

The people

Deleuze's conclusion to the question of political cinema, repeated without elaboration so often throughout his writings that it becomes a cliche itself, is 'If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet'.[36] Political cinema reaches an impasse in the discovery that there is no revolutionary proletariat for it to represent – for if such an organized force exists, it is already inscribed in modern political institutions, and thus for Deleuze cannot be an agent of the new. However, I prefer to borrow his theorizations to look for the temporary nodes of struggle that *do* define particular peoples as capable of action. We can pinpoint these struggles by looking for the ways they are denied speech: 'The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims "There have never been people here" ', Deleuze writes, 'the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves in shanty towns or in camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute'.[37] Indeed, keeping Foucault's criterion of visibility in mind, we may look most for a people to be inventing itself when the colonizers are busy explaining, apologizing for and normalizing their existence. This is the *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) approach to Native American history; the wartime patriotic musicals; the coverage of 'riots' (not rebellions) on the six o'clock news; the glossy calendar images of bucolic countryside. By contrast, gaps and silences point to sites of the emergence of the people.

36 Ibid., p. 216.

37 Ibid., p. 217.

Hybrid cinema doubts the assumptions that structure conventional films about minority history, fiction and documentary alike: namely that there is an intact oral history out there waiting to be tapped, recorded, and proffered to a community. While such work is important, it assumes that a history can be unproblematically reconstructed, given resources and a respite from censorship. But, to put it crudely, only certain statements are possible within a given discourse, and to make a film in which history is continuous is to concede to the naming power of those statements. As Akomfrah

says, 'The triumphalist vision of race and community operates on the assumption that there is essentially a core of affect that is structured around oratory, around song – giving it an irreducible unity . . . . You become aware that the diasporic is an act of will and memory because there are very few institutions that can substantiate that presence . . . . These are acts of will and memory and the very mode of remembering is essential for any historic project and I am not talking about just the very obvious mode of remembering history.'[38] Black Audio films *Who Needs a Heart?* and *Handsworth Songs* (1986), like *Calendar*, *History and Memory*, and other works of hybrid cinema, *will* fictions and silences to fill in the place of dysfunctional memory.

38 Akomfrah, quoted in Fusco, 'An interview with the Black Audio Film Collective', p. 51.

Intercessors

Cinematic archaeology is not a question of exhuming the 'authentic voice' of a minority people – for that would be a unitary voice and, in fact, it would simply replicate the transparent domination by which a minority is forced to speak in a minority voice. The minority artist, by contrast, dances along the border. He/she must undo a double colonization, since the community is colonized both by the master's stories and by its own, that have been translated and annexed by the colonizer. The photographer in *Calendar* fails in this respect initially: he buys into the dominant culture's image of what is Armenian, slotting the photographs of churches into the known quantity of calendarishness, while valiantly repressing the efforts of his other images to speak. 'The author must not', Deleuze writes, 'make himself into the ethnologist of his people, nor himself invent a fiction which would be one more private story'.[39] Conventional documentary participates as much as fiction cinema in the instrumentality of the colonizer's language, all the more so when it seems to have got hold of an 'authentic' quality in the colonized culture. Instead minority filmmakers, Deleuze argues, must destroy myths from the inside.

39 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 222.

Hybrid forms which undermine the dominance of any single genre are best able to set up myths, destroy them, and create them anew. Hybrid cinema is not a cinema of 'positive images' or corrective representations. Like Tajiri, Egoyan, and Akomfrah, filmmakers such as Masayesva, Pratibha Parmar and Isaac Julien from Britain's Sankofa workshop, Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, and Inuit videomaker Zacharias Kunuk work to create myths, to deny information about their cultures even as they spin stories.

The agents of hybrid cinema are what Deleuze calls 'intercessors', real characters who 'make up fiction'. These are not the docile informants of documentary, but resistant characters who dispute the filmmaker's construction of truth at every turn: Kazuo Hara's

power-hungry subjects, Trinh's evasive interlocutors, even Jean Rouch's characters with their own stories to tell. In *History and Memory*, it is Tajiri's amnesiac mother, whose memory consists only somatically, in the pain caused by denial and in the memory of water. The filmmaker goes digging herself, makes up stories, indeed becomes a surrogate rememberer.

Storytelling crosses and recrosses between private life and politics, making the boundary between them impossible to locate. As Benjamin suggests, storytellers' knowledge is of a different order from that which passes as official information. As 'the communicability of experience decreases', as official knowledge diverges from community experience (or vice versa), the storyteller's practical information becomes increasingly rare and precious.[40] Old people are thus repositories of virtual images; their death is like the loss of a past-that-is-preserved. Their stories, again, are like those 'radioactive fossils' that cannot be explained in terms of the geological layer on which they are found.

40 Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller: reflections on the work of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, pp. 84–7.

The intercessors in an act of filmic storytelling deterritorialize the image, by taking and recombining from existing image repertoires. In *History and Memory*, Tajiri's mother's single recollection image is of filling the canteen; her father remembers only the theft of their house; nobody recognizes the Office of War Information footage of the Poston camp (and the sound track plays a melancholy version of 'I Only Have Eyes for You'). But from these Tajiri is able to weave, to fabulate, a story through the telling of which the family regains their memory and the filmmaker herself achieves an identity. Memory, Deleuze writes, is a 'membrane, a double becoming' that constitutes anew both filmmaker and community; 'the people who are missing and the I who is absent'.[41] The storyteller's knowledge is collective: 'Story-telling is not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from politics, and *which itself produces collective utterances*'. In *History and Memory*, Tajiri reconstitutes herself, as well as the community of Japanese–Americans whose story of imprisonment was historically erased, in the process of looking for her mother's memories and the collective memories they metonymize.

41 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 221–2 (italics in original).

In his work with Guattari, Deleuze is the champion of smooth space, of a multiplicity that dissolves the static lines of striated space. Thus it seems most un-Deleuzian that his books on cinema stick to the hierarchy that puts individual creative geniuses first, storytellers second. In the hybrid, or experimental diasporan, films discussed here, the filmmaker acts not only as author but as specific intellectual, participating in local struggles against the dominant regimes of knowledge production.[42] The hybrid film is in a position to do archaeology, to sort through the rubble created by cultural

42 Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. xxvii.

dislocation and read significance in what official history overlooks. In the process, it simply produces briefly and contingently, the knowledge of a community in diaspora.[43]

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43 *History and Memory* is distributed by Women Make Movies, New York, tel. (212) 925 0606, and Jane Balfour Films Ltd., London, tel. (071) 267 5392. *Calendar* is distributed by Zeitgeist Films, New York, tel. (212) 274 1989, and ICA Projects, London, tel. (071) 930 0493. *Who Needs a Heart?* is distributed by Black Audio Film Collective, London, tel. (071) 267 0846.

Five Songs of the Scarlet Flower

TYTTI SOILA

It is rather unusual in Scandinavia that a film is remade more than once. There exist a few remakes of popular plays, and occasionally a popular motif from another country has tempted a company to invest in a domestic version, but what makes *The Song of the Scarlet Flower (Laulu tulipunaisesta kukasta/ Sången om den eldröda blomman)* unique is that it has been filmed no less than five times; three times in Sweden and twice in Finland.

An initial hypothesis to explain the attraction of this story is that it condenses many thematic stereotypes (expressed through images, characters and situations) which may be called ethnic in the sense that they are particularly common in Scandinavian fiction and seem to 'speak' directly to the people in these countries. By this I mean that the origins of such stereotypes can be found in the living conditions of each region. Ethnic stereotypes possess a capacity to trigger off a cluster of positive associations in people, thus reinforcing their affiliation to a certain (national) group.[1] The reinforcement of the (national) identity is in turn a source of pleasure and, hence, of popularity. Ethnic stereotypes, like the ethnic identity itself, seem to be resistant to change. But – as we shall see – their significance in the cultural context may alter along with the changes in society itself.

The aim of this study is to discuss the reception of a few stereotypes in addition to the question of nationality. The notion of national cinema is nebulous and problematic, and yet everyone seems to understand what it means; it is one of those 'common sensical' expressions that are used without any further reflection. Whilst not discussing the notion itself, my starting point is that national cinema has been – and I would maintain that it still is –

1 Nils-Hugo Geber, 'Den problematiska svenskheten', *Filmhäftet*, vol. 53 (1986), p. 7–17.

a significant reality for both audiences and producers of films in many countries and, as such, it ought to be taken into consideration within film studies. Thus, for instance, in Finland the national cinema arose as a conscious patriotic project,[2] the explicit purpose of which was to promote the identity of Finnish people, distinct from the Russian occupants at the turn of the century. The aim of film producers of this early period was to define the country and its people and make them familiar to their fellow citizens and to people abroad.

2 National feature film production was initiated through a manuscript competition; which was also how the Finnish National Opera and National Theatre were established at the end of the nineteenth century.

In addition to the notion of nationality I will study the way the five versions of the *Song of the Scarlet Flower* have been received by the critics through the (almost) five decades over which the different versions were made. For such a study, newspaper reviews are almost the only accessible source of information about the reactions and preferences of the audiences, apart from the unsatisfactory method of comparing the number of weeks that each film played in the movie-theatres.[3]

3 Until the 1960s, companies were quite reluctant to reveal the exact amount of money earned by each film unless it was an exceptional success – earning, for example, over one million marks or crowns.

It is likely that the film critics – especially those of the early days – do represent the opinions of ordinary middle-class spectators rather than those of a group of professionals with specialized points of view. In both Finland and Sweden, outside of the large cities, the film criticism in daily newspapers was most often written by ordinary journalists or freelancers, such as a schoolmaster with an interest in cinema. Film reviews written by professional film critics only appeared in the largest newspapers or cultural (literary) magazines. Yet the nearer we get to the present day, the greater the number of *professional* film critics and the greater the discrepancy between them and the provincial critics, let alone the common audiences.

When discussing the film reviews my focus is not how the critics 'read', or 'interpreted' the different versions of *The Song of the Scarlet Flower*, but rather in finding out what kinds of issues the critics discussed and set value on in their reviews. Nationality is, then, one of the most important questions on the agenda, since it is mentioned in almost every review in various ways. The early critics assumed that the positive value of a film was dependent on how truthful an image it gave of the country; of its nature and people primarily, but also of its customs and culture in general. The plot and settings were seen as a blueprint of the country and its people, and the debates were about the truthfulness of the filmic images. The *quest for realism*, which of course is at issue here, seems never to disappear entirely from the criteria of the reviews. However, the object of this quest changes in that the overt admiration of the landscape imagery ceases after the 1930s, providing space for the question of verisimilitude and the actuality of the scope that the plot deals with.

It seems, then, that film criticism since World War II in Sweden and Finland principally gave expression to the quest for a product of a unique, artistic talent (the director/auteur) stressing the values of

novelty and originality. Consequently, the familiar stories with predictable plot and settings, such as *The Song of the Scarlet Flower*, met with deprecating criticism. The quest for artistic novelty seems to have its roots in the European auteur films and in a wish to define cinema as 'culturally valuable', that is, as art – a wish promoted even by the film production companies.

The Song of a Scarlet Flower is based on a novel of the same name written by Finnish author Johannes Linnankoski. The novel became famous for its daring descriptions of the erotic experiences of the main character, and stirred up fiery debate in Finland on its release in 1905. Perhaps partly because of this debate the book was immediately translated into Swedish and published the next year.

The story in *The Song of a Scarlet Flower* is a simple initiation saga where the hero undergoes a series of adventures through which he proves his competence in the spheres of nature/sexuality and culture/labour. The story begins when a young farmer's son, Olavi, falls in love with a servant girl and fights with his father who does not approve of the relationship. Olavi leaves his home in anger and joins a group of wandering lumberjacks.

Lumberjacks cut timber during the winter season in the northern wilderness and drive it down the great rivers to the sawmills by the sea during the summer. The work was badly paid, hard and dangerous. The great rivers of northern Finland and Sweden have many rapids and waterfalls, and getting the timber past them was often extremely hazardous. The adventurous and relatively free life in the wilderness was a hotbed for all kinds of myths and stories, and from the beginning of this century the lumberjack has been an archetypal character in Finnish popular fiction where he stands for freedom, virility and individuality, as well as for the mastery of the natural world.

Nature is, of course, a global resource for myths and beliefs but I would like to maintain that for Scandinavian people and in Scandinavian life it has a special meaning.[4] The wilderness and the woods, as well as the lakes and rivers, are understood and experienced as the blissful realm of plenty, of recreation and power. Anomalies like mountains and waterfalls were, and perhaps still are, thought to contain hidden forces. In fiction these anomalies have developed into signs with mysterious and often contradictory meanings.

It is important to note that in Scandinavian fantasy, nature is almost always a positive element. It may sometimes prove dangerous but most often only in order to protect itself against intruders. A person, or a character that proves his or her mastery over nature is thought to have gained access to nature's richness and power. Thus

4 Midsummerday is celebrated all over Scandinavia with feasts of herring, strawberries and alcohol. From then on, practically the whole of Finland and Sweden close down for five weeks. Everyone who has the chance retreats to their summer cottage, camping van or tent in order to enjoy their summer close to nature.

the fictional lumberjack surviving in the wilderness and 'taming' the waterfalls is often understood as such a character.

Finnish film critics Anu Koivunen and Kimmo Laine have discussed the rich and contradictory meaning of water and its anomalies in a study of lumberjack films, and write:

> a foaming waterfall can often be seen behind the credits in the beginning of films. This is an image that reinforces the metaphoric position of a lumberjack film. So many central cultural meanings intertwine with water that only an image of it leads the spectator towards a definite complex of problems: the images of water, the image of a waterfall, refers to the working out of the problems of masculinity and social development. The waterfall is the sign for the necessity of taming and being tamed, a sign that refers to both wildness and harnessment.[5]

Even in *The Song of a Scarlet Flower* the waterfall – 'potent elixir, passion's symbol and a death trap' as Swedish film critic Nils-Hugo Geber has called it[6] – becomes the nodal point of this ambiguous cluster of meanings. One of the most central elements in the film is, consequently, the scene where Olavi rides a dangerous waterfall balancing on a log. This was also a scene that was always commented on in the reviews; in the early years it was hailed simply as a magnificent and exciting spectacle. But in the second version some critics complained that it was reduced to a detail and sometimes the reviewers remarked that they were tricked by the fact that a stand-in was used instead of the actor that played Olavi. The reviews of the latest version mentioned that the director of the film himself was one of the men to ride the waterfall.

While wandering about, Olavi meets and seduces many young girls and finally meets his great love in a proud and self-conscious Kyllikki, daughter of a prosperous farmer. When passing the estate, Olavi asks her for a flower – a symbolic invitation to sexual intercourse – but instead of falling for his charm, Kyllikki challenges him by saying that a man who wishes for her company must dare for more than just to ask for flowers.

When Olavi proves himself worthy of Kyllikki's love and proposes to her, he is humiliated by her father and the young man goes on with his restless life. He finally confronts the consequences of it, and penitent, he returns home and makes peace with his family. After a few years, Olavi returns to Kyllikki who has faithfully waited for him. This time she defies her father, reconciles herself with Olavi's past life, and the couple are able to take their place in society and raise the next generation.[7]

It is Kyllikki's challenge that provokes Olavi to ride the dangerous rapids near her home. Thus the waterfall in this story marks both female and male sexuality: it signifies both Kyllikki's pride and chastity which Olavi vanquishes, and Olavi's overpowering of his

5 Anu Koivunen and Kimmo Laine, 'Metsästä pellon kautta kaupunkiin ja takaisin', in Akohas, Lahti and Silvonen (eds), *Mieheyden tiellä: maskuliinisuus ja kulttuuri* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, Nykykulttuurin tutkimusyksikkö, 1993). This, and other translations, my own.

6 Geber, 'Den Problematiska svenskheten'.

7 My brief description does not do justice to this novel which is written in a modernistic manner. It has a strong moral theme and a distinct female discourse, siding with the girls whom Olavi deceives and with Kyllikki who proudly challenges him.

own sexuality, directing himself towards the socially acceptable state of monogamy.

In all five versions of the film Olavi is portrayed as an unchangeable character. He wears his boots, sweater, knife and a characteristic hat no matter when or in which country the films were made.

The first film version is from 1919 directed by Mauritz Stiller, one of Sweden's most famous silent film directors. The critics hailed the film as a masterpiece and it was later distributed to forty-two countries. It is said to be one of the films that contributed to the increasing popularity of Swedish silent cinema. In Stockholm it was shown for five weeks; longer than any other domestic film before.

At this time, the novel of Linnankoski was well-known, even to the Swedish audiences, and the critics seem to have used it as a reference point when evaluating the film. This was also the reason for the only negative reviews the film received: according to these the film did not quite succeed in conveying the poetic air and expressionistic language of the novel.[8]

8 '-n', *SocialDemokraten*, 16 April 1919

When discussing the later versions of the story it has been only Finnish critics that compare them to the novel. Over time the overriding tendency among the critics has been instead the quest for realism on several levels: from the reviews of the very first version, much interest was focused on the credibility of the characters, the authenticity of the mise-en-scene and the national origins of the story.

***Sången om den eldröda blomman/The Song of the Scarlet Flower* the first (silent) version – (Mauritz Stiller, Sweden, 1919). Courtesy: BFI Stills.**

The landscape seems to have awoken the patriotic feelings of the early film critics who focused on the photographic motifs and used many words to describe the spectacular values of the film. It was described as a poem surpassing the wonders of Mother Earth herself – beyond the magnificent nature in northern Sweden: 'The masterly art of direction gives convincing evidence of the beauty of Sweden'.[9]

Another critic remarks on the fact that the story is originally Finnish and, when praising the beauty of the landscape, he notes that it is in fact rather similar to that of northern Finland and is therefore a suitable backdrop for a Finnish saga.[10] He also points out that the director of the film is Finnish by birth and must have chosen a landscape that reminded him of his own country.

In Finland the origins of the story were, of course, a main issue in the reviews. The film played in Helsinki for an extraordinary four weeks and the newspapers reported audiences giving standing ovations to the cinema screen curtains.

At the time the film was released in Finland the country had been independent for just about two years, and decades of Russian oppression had come to an end. Patriotic sentiments were strong and were expressed whenever possible, film reviews being no exception. The film was appreciated by the critics but they could not help pointing out their belief that as a Finnish production the film would have gained in credibility and ethnographic value.[11] The request for realism seems to have been a leading principle in this criticism: 'A Finnish story ought to be produced by Finnish people, in Finland. It is but then that the world is able to meet with an authentic image of the Finnish folk soul'[12] concludes the critic in the patriotic *Uusi Suomi* (*New Finland*), after pointing out that the real problem with the Stiller film was not the ethnographic confusions but that the film lacked a genuine Finnish feeling.

When studying the reviews it seems clear that in order to appeal to the audiences' ethnic recognition and patriotic feelings, extracinematic information is necessary. The audiences must, one way or another, know that the images are authentic; that the film really was shot in the home country. It is obviously not good enough to recognize that the images on the screen were *similar* to those of home.

In this context it is interesting to note that both early Swedish versions – the Stiller version and the first sound version from 1934 – used the Finnish names of the characters and places (with the exception that the name of Olavi was translated to Olof). This leads to an unexpected contradiction in the reviews: on one hand, the Swedish critics praised the film because it confirmed the beauty of the Swedish countryside, but on the other, the fact that the story was situated in Finland did not seem to bother them at all. This paradox might be explained by the fact that Finland did belong to

9 'Orasnij Dinvel', *Arbetet*, 16 April 1919.

10 'Jens Flik', *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 14 April 1919.

11 'A L', *Uusi Suomi*, 4 October 1919.

12 Ibid.

Sweden for hundreds of years and that both countries share many cultural features.[13]

Another explanation could be that Swedish people often seem to consider Finns as their emotional 'other': they see Finns as more temperamental, even explosive, an earth-bound people able to express what the Swedes perhaps repress. Their own self-image, by contrast, often consists of adjectives such as kind, considerate, cautious, low-key and controlled.[14] It is quite in accord with these prejudices that this story of passions would take place among Finnish people. This interpretation is reinforced, as we will see, by the reviews of the first Finnish version of the film, directed in 1938 by Teuvo Tulio.[15]

The 1934 version, directed by Per Axel Branner, was compared with its predecessor (rereleased in 1928) and was the loser according to the Swedish critics, receiving decent but not enthusiastic reviews. In Finland the reception was much less restrained. The Finnish critics maintained that the sound version was far more effective and did better justice to the novel than its predecessor[16] – and they did not mind the language being Swedish. This is somewhat surprising during a period when domestic films were appreciated far more than foreign films, and especially since the Swedish language was rather resented in Finland as an upper-class language.

It was inevitable that one or two critics suggested the possibility of producing a Finnish version and when the film was finally released in 1938, it was, not surprisingly, advertised as a special event. The Finnish critics were positive and praised the powerful river landscapes that 'would have been too many if they weren't so attractive to the eye',[17] as one writer put it. The Swedish critics were overwhelmingly appreciative: 'The film is carried forward by the genuine Finnish temperament, both wordless and violent, which alone is able to make this passionate saga plausible', wrote a critic in *Tidningen Uppsala* in 1939.[18]

When the Branner version was shown in Uppsala in 1934, the film critic noted that the audience was laughing 'in the wrong places' and wondered whether the problems explored in the story were becoming old fashioned and whether the saga of Olavi and Kyllikki was destined to lose its hold on audiences.[19] This definitely seems to have happened in 1956 when the third version of *The Song of the Scarlet Flower* was released.

The film was directed by Gustaf Molander who had written the manuscript for the first, Stiller version. This remake was shot in colour with the new AgaScope[20] system and this time the reviews paid great attention to the photography of the landscape and the magnificent scenery: a few critics complained that the colours were

13 For instance, a great part of the population of northern Sweden spoke Finnish as their mother tongue – and still do.

14 Åke Daun, *Svensk mentalitet* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1989).

15 'Onkel', *Tidningen Uppsala*, 31 October 1919.

16 *Uusi Suomi*, 5 December 1938.

17 'S', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 5 December 1938.

18 'Onkel', *Tidningen Uppsala*, 31 October 1939.

19 Henning Osterberg ('Heng'), *Tidningen Uppsala*, 27 December 1934.

20 The Swedish experimental equivalent to Cinemascope.

Critics found the characters in Gustaf Molander's 1956 version 'not psychologically credible'. Courtesy: BFI Stills.

bluish[21] whilst others stated that the film images were showy like a postcard.[22]

This is, however, the period when the main interest of the critics shifted from the reproduction of landscape and nature to the verisimilitude of the characters. The reviews found that they were not psychologically credible and maintained that neither Olavi nor Kyllikki were characters whom the modern public could identify with. 'No farmer's daughter who would let a man risk his life for a rose exists anymore',[23] insisted Robin Hood (a pseudonym), the Grand Old Man of the film critics, although he is virtually the only one to point out that the film is not intended to be realistic.

Ten years earlier a Swedish film with a similar theme, a rural melodrama called *Rain follows the Dew*, was one of the greatest box-office successes ever in the country – although the critics had been rather lukewarm in their praise.[24] A crucial shift in the preferences of audiences, and certainly those of the film critics, had occurred during these ten years. This shift has also been noted by Anu Koivunen and Kimmo Laine, who maintain that in Finland the lumberjack films could initially be classified as rural melodramas but that later, during the first half of the 1950s, the same themes were found in comedies instead. The archetypal character of the lumberjack, whilst still maintaining an air of unruly freedom, had thus degenerated from dramatic hero to clown.

It is also interesting to note a couple of significant changes in *The Song* of 1956. In earlier versions the settings had been contemporary, indicating that the complex of problems was familiar

21 'Lill', *Svenska dagbladet*, 27 December 1956.

22 Alf Montan, *Expressen*, 27 December 1956.

23 Robin Hood, *Stockholmstidningen*, 27 December 1956.

24 For example Nils Beyer, *MT*, 27 December 1946. Robin Hood, *Stockholmstidningen*, 27 December 1946.

to the audiences. This time, however, the story is set somewhere in the utopian past, as though the filmmakers understood that the passionate scope of the story was losing its vitality in the eyes of modern audiences and wanted to create a homage to a vanishing genre; a sort of nostalgic pastiche of a lost time. This is at least what a couple of film critics suggest.[25]

Another shift that occurs when this story is transposed to the past is that it also becomes essentially Swedish: in the 1956 version all the names of places and characters were translated into Swedish. The only exception is Kyllikki, and the dialogue makes the point that her name is strange. A question that remains unanswered is whether this fact has a connection with the common Swedish policy in the 1950s of preventing the Finnish-speaking people of northern Sweden from officially using their mother tongue.

The story is no longer Finnish and this is what the Finnish critics of course reacted against in their reviews. Not that their motivation was specifically patriotic, but they felt that the film gave the Swedish and not the Finnish tourist industry an excellent opportunity to market their country to foreigners. One of the critics, however, found it intolerable to see Kyllikki decorating her Christmas tree with Swedish flags.[26]

If the fourth version was resented during the 1950s, the reviews given to the fifth version in 1971 were crushing: the actors were bad; the main character pathetic;[27] the dialogue helpless;[28] the story outdated. As one critic puts it, the entire film was totally unnecessary and he concludes by wondering what kind of motivation lay behind the idea of warming up a stone-dead story again.[29] It didn't seem to help that the director of the film, Mikko Niskanen, himself rode the rapids on a log. The critics were completely unanimous in their cruel verdict and the film was never exported to Sweden.

It is possible, however, to see in both the Molander version from 1956 and the one from 1971 interesting formal changes that most critics, in their negative approach and their obsession with the quest for realism, failed to notice: up to 1938 the films are striving for an illusion of reality and attempt to create their own closed universe according to the model of the classical narrative. The 1956 film, with its clinical cleanliness, saturated colours and almost artificial landscapes, contains instead a visual excess that seems self-aware – a fact observed by the elderly critic, Robin Hood. Similarly, Mikko Niskanen in 1971 places several anachronistic elements in his film. Thus, for instance, some actors wear clothes that resemble those used at the turn of the century whereas others wear modern clothes. This indicates an attempt to propose that the scope of the story could be universal and might address modern audiences too. Niskanen also adds nonrealistic elements, such as the dialogue between flowers on the windowsill. This, perhaps surprisingly, brings

25 Robin Hood and Mauritz Edström.

26 'Top Hat', 'Ruotsinliput Kosekelan Olavin joulukuusessa', *Elokuvaaitta*, February 1957, pp. 16–17.

27 Paula Talaskivi, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 30 December 1971.

28 Kairi Karemo, *Kaleva*, 21 January 1972.

29 Mikael Fränti, *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti*, 31 September 1971.

the last version of the story closer than any other version to the original novel – a fact that was neither noted nor appreciated by any critic.

This was not, however, the end of the lumberjack. The television companies in both countries have shown different versions of *The Song of the Scarlet Flower* and, like all old domestic films, they have proved quite popular. Thus, when the 1938 version was shown on Finnish television at the end of the 1980s, the critics focused on the director Teuvo Tulio as an auteur and the film got appreciative reviews.[30] It seems, then, as if the archetypal character of lumberjack in the guise of Olavi has not been completely banished from Scandinavian popular imagery: when the distance becomes great enough, we can come to an understanding of his existence.

30 Sakari Toiviainen, *Ilta-Sanomat*, 5 February 1983.

reports and debates

debate:

After the classic, the classical and ideology: the differences of realism

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

John Corner is right to be concerned about the imprecise wielding of the concept of realism in much contemporary media theory, and wrong if he thinks the concept itself can be abandoned.[1] But the most striking thing about his piece is its very compressed form. Perhaps because of this compression, he does not mention some important problems – the collapse of Marxism, the developments of postmodernism – and skates over several others. The healthy desire to start a debate may justify some omissions and compressions; but the forms these elisions take in Corner's note, and their consequences for its argument, suggest to me that the bodies of work known roughly as 1970s theory cannot be allowed to rot where they lie or to crumble away gently with the passage of time. They form part of a heritage which has to be analysed directly if we want to 'think ourselves out of a mess'[2] or to salvage from that period elements which may serve in the development of more pertinent theories or more sensitive criticism.

The two most striking examples of *not* looking into problem areas come in the centre of Corner's argument, in the last paragraph of the section in which he has been discussing 'the real and the realistic' and 'realism of form/realism of theme'. Firstly, Corner attributes television theory's concern with realism of form to the influence of film theory.

1 John Corner, 'Presumption as theory: "realism" in television studies', *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 97–102.

2 Ibid., p. 102.

> Moreover, this influence was exerted at a time (the mid 1970s) when the ideological consequences of classical Hollywood cinematic form constituted the key focus of a newly emerging radical wing of film studies.

Secondly, this leftwing formalism did allow one kind of realism, so long as it could be presented as having explicit, politically progressive content, as in the case of the BBC Television series *Days of Hope* (1975):

> This thematic (and publicly controversial) link between television representation and social and political realities needed to be addressed within a different analytical frame from that provided by the study of form, even if finally the two had to be related. Otherwise, the issue of 'reference' would be completely displaced by that of 'signification', as often happened. An overblown notion of realism (partly parasitical on an overblown and increasingly mystical concept of ideology) acted as a block to any more incisive conceptualisation.[3]

3 Ibid., pp. 100–101.

The question begged by the first of these formulations is absolutely crucial: is there or was there ever a meaningful entity, effective on either the practical or the theoretical level, which could honestly or adequately be called classical Hollywood cinematic form? If there is not, it follows that media theory which assumes otherwise must be built around a shaky core. If there is or was such a form, a rider to the first question might be: does the form have ideological consequences? If so, how can they be described or accounted for?

The problem hidden by Corner's second formulation is that of the concept of ideology itself. The inference of what he writes is that there is a bad concept of ideology (overblown, mystical, misused by leftwing formalists), but perhaps somewhere behind it a good one (accurate, incisive, used by sociologists and media studies theorists). Is it not rather the case that ideology has become a hopelessly unusable term? Specifically, when we try to deal with the relations and connections between works of art and/or communication, and the issues of social life and/or history, can the concept of ideology help in any meaningful way? It may well be that 1970s theory operated an amalgam between formalist antirealism and a hypertrophied version of ideology, but the ideology part did not come from film theory. If the study of television has not developed as strongly as it might, it is perhaps because it has been restrained by the stases imposed on the understanding of social, political and aesthetic issues by the repeated wielding of the clumsy club of ideology.

In the first part of this essay I shall try to unpick the notion of classical Hollywood cinematic form. Of necessity, this will lead on to some discussion of language, convention, narrative and realism. In

the second part I shall discuss (but selectively) the archetypal 1970s concept of ideology. Finally I shall say why the concepts of realism and its linked partner antirealism remain important in film theory and criticism and are likely to be so in the study of television too.

The notion of classical Hollywood cinematic form is an amalgam of two distinct concepts: the Classic Realist Text of Colin MacCabe[4] and the Classical Hollywood Cinema of David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger.[5] These two ideas have been conflated in many an undergraduate essay and no doubt in many an academic paper since the mid 1980s, and it is this conflation that Corner reproduces without question. MacCabe's idea set a political tone, while that of Bordwell and his colleagues set an aesthetic one. I shall discuss MacCabe first.

MacCabe's initial argument was that the notions of realism and the real were both 'tied to a particular type of literary production – the nineteenth century realist novel'.[6] This idea was wrong, and put the cart before the horse. There are at least four other kinds of real and realism: emotional, pragmatic, philosophical and scientific, as well as the artistic kind, of which the nineteenth-century realist novel may well be a subset. Film is not dominated by the forms of the nineteenth-century novel. It draws on a wider range of sources and inputs.

MacCabe went on to assert that the narrative prose of the novel functioned as what he called a metalanguage – a form of direct address which expressed truth claims. It aspired to states of transparency and dematerialization, and attempted to abolish the articulations of language, to deny the fact of separation between what is said and the act of saying it, to hide the fact that interpretation is deferred until after diction, or in a word, 'to *anneal*, to make whole, through denying its own status as writing'[7] and as articulation. Annealment, in ceramics, is the fusion of different materials in intense heat. Via a process akin to this fusion, it is asserted, the narrative prose of the novel becomes a metalanguage and simultaneously claims 'direct access to a final reality'.[8]

The concepts of articulation, separation, and the deferment of interpretation, which MacCabe brings to this discussion from the Saussurean tradition and from Derrida are all interesting in themselves, but I think that in this context they were never strong enough to impose the concept of a metalanguage against two more serious (and also more obvious) considerations. Firstly, none of the narrative prose forms of the nineteenth-century realist novel – Dickens, Balzac, Eliot, Zola, Gissing, whoever – attempted to deny their own status as writing or as articulation. In fact they were, and are, only legible and interpretable through understandings of the articulations which they embody at almost every turn. Secondly, no

4 Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 7–27.

5 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema – Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985). The CHC concept also figures in: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*, first edition (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); the second (1986), third (1990) and fourth editions, as 'Classical narration: the Hollywood example'; the revised edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993); and in Bordwell's solo work *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985).

6 MacCabe, 'Realism and the cinema', p. 8.

7 Ibid., p. 9.

8 Ibid., p. 10.

mode of writing is powerful enough to operate the annealment MacCabe imagines for his metalinguistic text.[9] The signs and practices of writing have been often clear, and always noticeable, in every kind of writing, even the ones which most strenuously attempt to present or represent aspects of lived experience. The difficulty, at least for the kind of theory which wants to produce a monolithic account of these practices, is that the signs and practices vary, overlap with each other, differ. Hence the importance of concepts like convention, articulation, combination, discourse, multiplicity of viewpoint, structure and genre. These concepts have connections with (in some cases, roots in) the sciences of language, without being restricted by or contained in them. Their deployment would be an important part of the basis of a healthy theory and criticism of literature. Even a minimal deployment would make it clear how irrelevant the concepts of metalanguage and annealment are. In short, the hypothetical use of one artistic convention does not have the power to wipe out the operations of all the other conventions and practices. I say 'hypothetical' because I think that the number of literary works dependent on a single convention must be very small indeed. MacCabe approaches this area from the direction of language, but instead of using its resources he wilfully restricts them to a simplified problematic about articulation.

In turning to try to apply the fantasy of the Classic Realist Text (CRT) to film, MacCabe suddenly and uncritically adopted a term whose contemporary origins lay in the sociological and Marxist traditions. This term was dominance:

> . . . does this definition carry over into films where it is certainly less evident where to locate the dominant discourse? It seems to me that it does and in the following fashion. The narrative prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up in the cinema by the narration of events.[10]

Probably feeling the need to be concrete at this point, MacCabe searched for and found a cinematic equivalent for his metalinguistic narrative prose of fiction. This was nothing more nor less than the film imagetrack – the pictures. 'The camera shows us what happens.'[11] MacCabe asserted for the film camera the same claims to positions of knowledge and truth he thought could be found in the nineteenth-century novel's metalanguage. It seems highly arguable whether or not the narration of events in film occupies the position or the function of knowledge. It often occupies a central, structurally important position. But can this position be equated with one of knowledge? If there were a position of knowledge, could it be located in the imagetrack alone? It certainly could not. If there were a position of knowledge (about the workings of a film narrative) it would have to be located in a combination or synthesis

9 The use of the concept of 'text' became generalized following semiotics and 1970s formalism. Appropriate for dealing with works of literature, criticism and (perhaps) information display systems, it has never been adequate for films or television. Its use tends to obscure the facts that film and television are both works and experience – constructed, made, interpreted and consumed by people.

10 MacCabe, 'Realism and the cinema', p. 10.

11 Ibid.

of several different tracks, strands or places. It would have to give some account of the emotion or idea that the narrative is devised to embody, represent or talk about. It would have to take on board the institution of characterization. It would acknowledge the crucial principle of conflict, both within and between characters, and between characters and other forces active or implied. Once it was established that idea and emotion, character and conflict, were the basic instruments of narrative articulation, it would be interested in the ways in which complication, development and outcome or resolution function as further articulations of narrative systems, and especially of the initial data. It would deal with the specific characteristics of the imagetrack (the systems often known as mise-en-scene) and with the various layers of the soundtrack.

It might also draw on the distinctions and relations made by the Russian formalists between *fabula* – the raw material of a story, the statement of the things that happen in it – and *syuzhet* – the ways in which these materials are shaped and transformed by artistic procedures. It might make use of the idea of narrative function sketched out by Propp and developed by others, in which the actions of characters are presented only in the light of their significance for the storytelling structure, but a clear idea of the parameters of one kind of structure also emerges. It might well turn to the substantial work done in the first period of film semiotics, in which Metz developed the idea of the relations between syntagmatic (sequential) and paradigmatic (lateral, alternative, vertical or static) elements in film language. It would certainly be interested in Nick Browne's demonstration of how the spectator engages independently and perhaps uncertainly with the experience of the film text,[12] responding variably to the complicated interplay of the different layers of textual elements (in Browne's example primarily points of view and editing, but in principle extensible) and extratextual authority (here the moral outlook of the producers of the narrative, but potentially also other factors in the contexts of production or reception). It might even want to draw on Barthes' adumbration of a constantly changing network of codifications at play in the unfolding of a written narrative.[13]

In this complex, multiple network of different strands, the imagetrack will be only one feature. It may well be potent and significant, but it will not be able to 'show us what happens' or 'tell the truth against which we can measure the discourses'. It is only one of those discourses and is too imbricated with the others to attain or sustain the metalinguistic, dominating, 'final' senses MacCabe wanted to claim on its behalf.

If one does not simplify narrative into a stable, fixed formal identity, and if one sees it as significant rather than dominant, the problems about it arise in more interesting and analyzable forms. MacCabe, however, remained fixated on one narrative and, behind

12 Nick Browne, 'The spectator-in-the-text: the rhetoric of *Stagecoach*', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1975/6), pp. 26–37.

13 Despite Barthes's essentially negative attitude towards narrative, his constant repulsion of it into the field of the readerly. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill/Wang, 1970).

it, one ideology, and he set the first of these fixations out clearly in the climax to the first section of the article:

> To return, however, to the narrative discourse. It is necessary to attempt to understand the type of relations that this dominant discourse produces. The narrative discourse cannot be mistaken in its identifications because the narrative discourse is not present as discourse – as articulation. The unquestioned nature of the narrative discourse entails that the only problem that reality poses is to go and look and see what *Things* there *are*. The relationship between the reading subject and the real is placed as one of pure specularity. The real is not articulated – it is. These features imply two essential features of the classic realist text:
>
> 1 The classic realist text cannot deal with the real as contradictory.
> 2 In a reciprocal movement the classic realist text ensures the position of the subject in a relation of dominant specularity.[14]

14 MacCabe, 'Realism and the cinema', p. 12.

MacCabe was simply wrong when he asserted that narrative discourse is not present as discourse or as articulation. Consider the following: characterization and character function, conflict, development, structure (including exposition and outcome), mise-en-scene and the deployment of soundtracks, *fabula/syuzhet* relations, syntagm and paradigm relations, and the palimpsests of codification systems at work in most films, especially narrative ones. What on earth are all these practices if not articulations? They are the articulations which make up narrative and they have to be present in one form or another, otherwise there is no narrative. Far from being unquestioned, narrative forms and narrative discourse are frequently questioning and very frequently in conflict within and between themselves. Once one accepts that narrative is a multiple, problematic form rather than a homogenized monolith, this idea is quite easy to understand.

Now we reach the nub of the problem about realism and MacCabe's biggest mistake of all. Since narrative is in the first place a conscious arrangement of a multiplicity of artistic practices it cannot plausibly make the simple truth-claims, nor impose the hierarchy of discourses he tried to tar it with, nor can it possibly just be inviting the spectator to 'go and look and see'. The most naturalistic or documentary-style film or television programme does far more complicated things than that. Narrative and realism are not coterminous. The mistake was to have collapsed them one into the other.

Why did this come about? To understand why, it might be useful to reflect on two concepts MacCabe does not make use of. The first of these is convention. Art and communication function through varying ranges of developing devices and conventions about using them. In our culture there is still a difficulty about using the term

'convention'. Its connotations are felt to be pejorative because of the implication that there might be a given or 'correct' way of doing things, and because the repeated use of conventions is thought to deaden artistic and/or social experience. While one version of postmodernism revalidates the concept, another implies the disappearance of all conventions. Hence the pursuit of nonconventional or anticonventional means of art and communication (which, if successful, contribute to the creation of new conventions) and also the more gradual evolution of new forms of conventions within the existing bodies and frameworks of expression.

In fact convention need not be such a scary term. What it means is a degree of agreement between a given audience or audiences and the producers. This agreement is enacted through the work, operating certain restrictions on and affording certain liberties to it. Narratives in different media use a varying range of conventions, some of which we have discussed above. Had MacCabe been able to see the multiplicity of these conventions (for serious analysis of which criticism still has a lot of space) he might have been able to avoid the homogenized fetish of his singular 'narrative discourse'. Likewise, artistic realism is also a network of differing conventions. It – or rather they – do not commit the reader or spectator to the endless pursuit of the nineteenth-century novel or similar forms, although they can make pleasant, stimulating, satisfying or disturbing reference to already existing or recycled elements. Perhaps even more importantly, they can be – and often are – linked in with nonrealist or antirealist elements. The work can combine attempts to copy life, to produce an adequate representation of it, with attempts to shape something else out of it, to stand back from it, to turn it into a spectacle and/or to pass judgement on it. The point here is flexibility: the uses of the medium remain movable within the conventions of realism; the conventions allow degrees of freedom for producers and for audiences.

The use of realist conventions does not, in itself, provide or imply provision of 'knowledge or how things really are'. On the other hand, it may, and quite often does, work within the framework of, or in relation to, social conventions involving truth or knowledge. It would be difficult to tell a love story without appealing, on one level or another, to some people's knowledge of what love is like. It is quite likely, in the construction of a mystery or detective story, that the producers will allude to the problematics of knowledge in their own right. It would be difficult to describe a situation in which one of the main points is the revelation of new elements (whether shocking or just not yet known) without some form of reliance on the concept of truth. It is also possible that the specific forms of these dependencies, allusions and references may have things in common with the social outlooks of various groups of people, with

some aspect of their ideas about 'how things really are'. In the case of the cinema these relations are unlikely to be exclusive, because of the general wish to appeal to the responses of more than one audience or social grouping. Because of all these factors, the ways in which reference can be made to the notion of 'how things are' are intensely variable; the references themselves are shot through with convention. Realisms do, necessarily, tangle with conventional ways of seeing the truths and emotions of social and cultural life. But this involvement does not mean the adoption of fixed positions for the subject, the audience or the medium.

To put it another way, we as spectators make as strong demands for reference from movies as from other art and communication forms. The directions, the modes and the force of these references vary, exercizing themselves in different ways and in relation to different aspects of film and television works, and of emotional, cultural and social life. We need films to be about life in one way or another, but we allow them latitude about how they meet this need. In response to this, films offer the spectating subject and audiences a range and interplay of conventions in action: technical, formal, narrative, nonrealist, generic, cultural, social, realist, specialist or some combination of these. Since this is so, the relationship between the reading subject and the film is one of negotiation and interpretation. The pure specularity to which MacCabe tries to limit it would be hopelessly inadequate to deal with so vigorous a compound. The film is articulated, and would not make sense if it were not. There was never any such thing as the CRT, but films, including realist ones (those using realist conventions among others) can deal with the real as contradictory, and in fact often do. Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1953), in some respects a realist film, is full of contradictions, most of which it controls and explores. It also has a conception of the real, and it deals with it as contradictory. It does not ensure a position of specularity for anyone.[15]

The other concept MacCabe cannot allow into the discussion is experience. In the climate of the mid 1970s the idea was equated with illusion, ideology and anti-intellectualism, and constantly derided. If by itself it can explain little, in conjunction with other concepts like convention, language, structure and discourse it may still help in allowing film theory to develop out of the sterility into which the false concept of the dominant metalanguage plunged it. Once the dead arm of the CRT has been disposed of, it may be helpful to remember that films draw on experience; they make it into something else which is also an experience, or create a new experience of their own and/or their genres, and the act of consuming them is yet another experience. The conventions in and through which they are made are the language in which these processes happen.

15 This is the point of intersection between 1970s antirealism and psychoanalysis. Lack of space (as well as the sense that the psychoanalytic issues are less important than the ones about realism) prevent me from going further into it here.

In comparison with MacCabe, David Bordwell's work around narrative has displayed several positive characteristics. The first two parts of *Narration in the Fiction Film* contain a useful discussion of several different theories of film narrative. In focusing positively on spectator involvement ('The viewer's activity' is the title of one chapter), Bordwell rejects the idea that film positions anybody. He also criticizes the simplified concepts of illusionism and spectator passivity which were the immediate outcome of the CRT idea and several other aspects of 1970s theory. In three pages of another chapter, Bordwell also rejects MacCabe's metalanguage of dominant narrative in novel and film, drawing instead on a concept of heterogeneity which is derived from Bakhtin: 'Bakhtin shows that even in the most "realistic" novels, the narrator's language will interact dynamically with several discourses, not all of them attributable to direct character speech'.[16] Likewise, a major contribution of Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's textbook *Film Art: an Introduction* has been its repeated statements of the multiplicity of the film medium, of its nature as a variable compound of different technical, stylistic, thematic and organizational layers.

16 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 20.

How is it that despite the nonreductionist aspects of some of these positions, Bordwell and his colleagues have figured as *de facto* supporters of the CRT concept? Perhaps their doubts about MacCabe were only partial, or posed them problems which they had difficulty in dealing with at any length.

This is not really important, though, because whatever the attitude of Bordwell and his colleagues to the CRT, they have a parallel monolith of their own. This is 'The Classical Hollywood Cinema' (CHC), an entity which makes its first appearance as a subheading in the 'Narrative form' section of chapter three ('Narrative and nonnarrative formal systems') of *Film Art* in 1979. It then grows rapidly via the section 'Narrative unity' in chapter nine ('Film criticism: sample analyses'), which consists of discussions of *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1934) and *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), stressing their supposed similarities. Then it bursts forth in its own big book (1985), and lives on, simultaneously, as 'Classical narration: the Hollywood example', chapter nine of *Narration in the Fiction Film*. By the time of the 1993 edition of *Film Art*, chapter three has been rejigged. After an interesting new section called 'Narration: the flow of story information' (pp. 75–81), there follows a further new section, 'Narrative conventions' (p. 81), the second subheading of which, on the very next page, turns out to be – 'The Classic Hollywood Cinema', much the same as it was in 1979, apart from one new paragraph about objectivity. In the film criticism section, towards the end of the book, there has been a real, though not properly acknowledged or addressed, broadening of the concept. It has now become 'The Classical Narrative Cinema'. *The Man Who*

Knew Too Much is gone, but *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), *Hannah and her Sisters* (Woody Allen, 1986) and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985) join *His Girl Friday* and *Stagecoach* in the Classical Narrative Corral. In thus quietly dropping the label 'Hollywood' and replacing it with narrative (while leaving the CHC more or less the same elsewhere), Bordwell and company seem effectively to be moving closer to the CRT and 'dominant narrative' – and thus contributing the Hollywood cinematic form element to the mess which displeases John Corner.

If MacCabe's great undefined term is 'classic', Bordwell and his colleagues go for the classical, and make several unconvincing attempts to justify it.[17] It involves storytelling, unity, realism, naturalism, emotional appeal, decorum, proportion, harmony, rule-governed but self-effacing craftsmanship, and 'mainstream'-ness. The cement of these qualities is continuity. For Bordwell and Thompson the 180 degree rule, the shot/reverse shot pattern, the eyeline match and the match on action add up to what Thompson calls 'the continuity system'. The combined effect of these devices is supposed to be 'basically' forwarding the spectator's involvement in the story to the exclusion of all else. At the same time he/she is supposed not to be aware of these processes. After describing, in the first scene of *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) a complicated set of operations involving all the above devices, Bordwell and Thompson conclude that 'The viewer is not supposed to notice all this'.[18] In principle, it may be possible to imagine a completely naive spectator (an elderly person, living far from the modern media, in the 1940s, who stumbled on *The Maltese Falcon* as his/her first cinematic experience) and could see nothing in it but the way the editing presented the story. In fact, however, spectators do notice at least some, perhaps all, of the complex of devices discussed by Bordwell and Thompson, and they use what they notice of these, together with other cues and promptings, to make sense of the film and interpret it. Awareness of the operations of the devices may also be part of the pleasure the spectators take in the films.

In the end, Bordwell and Thompson exaggerate the importance of what, by a subtle but typical slippage, they come to call 'the classical continuity system'.[19] It becomes the main instrument through which narrative development takes place, and through which time is made 'subordinate to causality'[20] and space, or rather 'a remarkably coherent spatial system' is turned into 'the vehicle of narrative causality'.[21] The monolith of the 'classical' style is erected on this one-sided reading of technical practices. Nothing is allowed seriously to qualify it. Differences between genres and studios, variations in the uses of lighting and colour, and differing uses of the long take and depth of field are all briefly glanced at before being crushed into uniformity. Bordwell is concerned that the spectator should be seen

17 Examples are in Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* (1979) p. 57, and (1993) p. 82; Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 3–4.

18 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* (1993), p. 270. The phrasing is revised since the 1979 edition, but still sloppy. Do they mean not notice any of this or all of this?

19 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* (1979) p. 171 and (1993) p. 275.

20 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 49.

21 Ibid., p. 59.

as active, but this is only 'within specific limits'.[22] The spectator takes part in making the meaning of the film, but only within the framework of what the film itself (and the system it belongs to) tells him or her to do: 'The spectator must cooperate in fulfilling the film's form. It is clear that the protocols which control this activity derive from the system of norms operating in the classical style.'[23]

In fact, Hollywood has always liked the lack of decorum as well as the presence of decorum: it is concerned with form and formal relations (but these may be harmonious or nonharmonious); it both respects and strives to destroy and/or change tradition; it is interested in fantasy, construction and articulation as well as in mimesis. Its craftsmanship is real but by no means always self-effacing. It is certainly interested in the spectator's responses, and in trying to understand and perhaps control them, but without confidence about how to do so, and there is nothing particularly cool about its attitude to these concerns. Hollywood films have distinct aesthetic qualities, but these do not necessarily include elegance or unity. As for the notion of 'mainstream film style': Hollywood is the single most significant centre of filmmaking in the world, and its films by and large the most distinctive body of work. But this work is by no means so unified in its language as to function as one style. And even if it were, there are other styles culturally, socially and even economically different and vigorous enough to make the labelling of Hollywood as mainstream a crude and misleading reduction.

The concept of ideology is not one which it has been possible to use with any rigour or probity since the period in which its negative and positive connotations became inextricably entangled with each other. Coined in the early modern era (1796) to mean the philosophy of mind, it soon acquired the negative senses of abstract, unrooted thinking (Napoleon), idealist inversion and false consciousness (Marx and Engels), and illusion, sometimes biased in the interests of a given social group (common sense and some aspects of the sociological and Marxist traditions). By the early twentieth century it had also developed a new, relatively positive usage as a body of ideas of any substantial kind, usually related to a social context. Both sociology and the Althusserean Marxism of the 1960s which influenced media theory depended on conceptual distinctions between ideology (meaning either experience or speculative thought) and science (demonstrated facts or theoretical knowledge). Terry Eagleton, in his recent attempt to salvage something from the wreckage, proposes that both the more positive and the negative senses 'have their uses, and that their mutual incompatibility, descending as they do from divergent political and conceptual histories, must be simply acknowledged'.[24] Ideology cannot be a

22 Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 21.

23 Ibid., p. 8.

24 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

practicable notion if it is firmly located in any one place, with the world view or interests of any one social class or group or in any specific literary, cultural or artistic style or figures of language:

> Dominant ideologies, and occasionally oppositional ones, often employ such devices as unification, spurious identification, naturalization, deception, self-deception, universalization and rationalization. But they do not do so universally; indeed it is doubtful that one can ascribe to ideology any *invariable* characteristics at all. We are dealing less with some essence of ideology than with an overlapping network of 'family resemblances' between different styles of signification.[25]

25 Ibid., p. 222.

No critical writing has yet managed to chart such a network and make the result convincing in terms of ideologies.

What specific roles did the concept of ideology play in the 'classic Hollywood cinematic form' compound? MacCabe, having cheerfully admitted that by and large no convincing Marxist theory of ideology existed, plunged uncritically into the Lacanian/Althusserian substitute and made it his centre of operations; the purpose of ideological representations is to place the subject in position in society. The strong following wind through the second half of the 1970s meant that Bordwell and company, not really interested in the concept for its own sake, perhaps saw the utility of adopting it to support the 'mainstream' side of their otherwise apolitical, indeed largely asocial account of Hollywood. The other linking factor is a static conception of form, in which periods, origins and schools control the meanings and interpretations of works even before the works are articulated *and* when they are rearticulated and reinterpreted in later periods. MacCabe returns to this frozen formalism (still dressed up in 'political' clothes) as recently as his 1992 preface to Jameson's *Geopolitical Aesthetic*:

> this postmodern medium [cinema] recapitulates the basic realism/modernism/postmodernism aesthetic development, with the classic Hollywood cinema representing realism (and a moment of innocence about the means of representation), the European cinema of the 50s and 60s reliving all the paradoxes of modernism (and Godard is here the exemplary figure) and a fully postmodern cinema having to wait until the early 70s.[26]

26 Colin MacCabe, 'Preface' to Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press/British Film Institute, 1992), p. xiii.

The decade-periodization is pretty wonky: the European cinema did more than the 'reliving' suggested here (though it should be said that the dead hand of the CRT has contributed to slowness in finding out what it did do), and postmodernism (full or half-full) is more complicated. But, above all, Hollywood has never been innocent about the means of representation. Its conventions could never be neatly aligned with realist ones. Only a theoretical or

critical practice bent on avoiding the truth would go on pretending they can.

The concept of ideology perished with Marxism, and needs to be replaced if the fields of theory and criticism associated with film and television are to come back to life and credibility after the decay and routine into which they fell, partly as a result of their association with this kind of Marxism. This replacement need not, I think, be too difficult. In many cases the Marxists and the non-Marxists who were influenced by them used the terms 'ideological' and 'ideology' to mean roughly the same as social and the social. In fact the use of the concept of ideology has become a way of avoiding discussing the social. Many of the classic Marxist writers were so disgusted by the realities of social life that they welcomed the concept of ideology as a means of escaping them via a blanket disapproval, which was what ideology, in its negative connotation, offered. Marx enjoyed designating the concern of middle-class intellectuals with social matters as hypocrisy, but the sneering tone of this condemnation[27] is all too compatible with the absolutism of his fantasies of redemption via the proletariat and of revolution via the self-action of the forces of production. (Later, more academic Marxists were not so much disgusted by social realities as simply ignorant of them.) Issues to do with the problems of and in social life lose definition and focus if we choose to address them as part of ideology. They become the hunting ground of a group of people (most famously, a 'class') or the representation of (self-) interest, delusion or bad faith. The label 'ideology' does nothing to clarify them and tends to inhibit active investigation or serious discussion.

27 As in Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, part 1, sections 1a, 1b and *The Communist Manifesto*, section 3.

The concept of ideology should thus be replaced by whichever more concrete term is appropriate to the field under discussion. In philosophical contexts we should speak of ideas or beliefs; in linguistic ones of convention, style and diction; and in historical and political ones of social conventions and ideas and of the social itself. In the contexts of art and communication, we should start from the same bases as in thinking about language, but remembering that the conventions of art are not identical with those of communication. We will be able to make more progress with the problems of the relations between art and society through concepts of diction, expression, convention and the social than was possible with the confusions of the term ideology, by means of which distinct areas and practices were often run together into shapeless, indiscriminate amalgamations: amalgamations like the Classic Realist Text, the Classical Hollywood Cinema and classical Hollywood cinematic form.

The recovery of both film and social life can only be accomplished by means of casting off both generalized determinism and the narrowly biased interpretations which derive from it. The latter will need to be replaced by a more responsive, honest and

analytical critical language which, as well as rehabilitating the social and aesthetic spheres, is likely to be accompanied, culturally, by the recuperation of the values of ethics and humanism, both so derided in the latter-day Marxist period. This project is not necessarily incompatible with understanding or developing postmodernist ideas which, read critically, can contribute to it.

We need the concept of realism for several important reasons. Film and television continue to have flexible cognitive and cognition-related dimensions. These operate on three broad levels. Firstly, the project of truth telling: the aim to say something directly or obliquely valid about an inter-individual, social or cultural situation or set of relations. This project sometimes has a strong emotional or moral base; if this is lacking, it still often refers to emotional and/or moral issues. Secondly, the positive interest in appearances: the idea that we can learn, on several levels, from how things, situations, states of affairs and aspects look, how they are presented and perceived. Finally, the aspiration towards a structure of cognition, whether revealed (laid bare on the surface, in the development or texture), constructed (in militant, evident form or formal relations), or deep (founded on the attempt to apply an underlying code or analysis, such as religion or history), or trying to combine aspects of these.[28] These dimensions are crucial; it is not possible to imagine film or television functioning adequately without at least selective versions of them.

[28] In postmodernism, for instance, there is a great devotion to appearances and a real engagement with structure. Although in principle truth-telling is downgraded, in practice there is plenty of room for certain forms of it.

At the same time, film and television are *also* rooted in convention and language. They display, and indeed often function through, self-consciousness about convention and language. Part of this self-consciousness is the media's sense of their own difference, of their nonreducibility to the signs or the referential contexts of the situations they deal in. These attributes of conventionality and self-consciousness have often been invoked in attempts to qualify, or substantively to dismiss, the cognitive dimensions set out above. What is needed in critical discussion of this area is a degree of discrimination. The conventional, self-conscious and different aspects of film and television do indeed qualify and set variable limits on the cognitive dimensions of each medium, shaping them so that they function both as real experiences and as mediating filters between the experiencing spectators and the materials (emotions, ideas, situations, contexts, stories) which the producers have fed into the language and structuring processes. They do not, however, dismiss the cognitive aspirations of spectators or media, or render them irrelevant. (Even less can they be said to turn them into ideology.) They use them, play with them to some extent, and reformulate them as artistic or communicative experiences from which the dimension of cognition is not absent. What role does the

concept of realism have to perform in these twinned fields of cognition and convention? Several, on condition that we confront the great mistakes of the 1970s and replace them with more serious attempts to understand. Realism is not a singular or univocal style. It is not a homogeneous or finished effect, nor is it a side effect of genre. Different generic configurations may well make their own versions of realism, but realism in itself does not emerge out of a work conforming with generic norms to 'produce the illusion of realism'.[29] Nor can it meaningfully be divided into two distinct, antagonistic entities – illusionist realism on one side and formal and intellectual consciousness-raising antirealism on the other, as the Toutvabienist anti-illusionism implicit in MacCabe and Bordwell tried to present them.[30] In the introduction to the Reader, *Realism and the Cinema*, I made the point that most useful discussion linked the two concepts of realism and antirealism, exploring the relations between them.[31] I'd like now to develop the linkage more concretely, and introduce two variations to it.

In films or television, where there is realism it is normally multiple and heterogeneous. It, or they – if, as seems preferable, we choose to formulate this multiplicity of elements as a plurality – are also accompanied either by their opposite, antirealism, or by their nonidentical different, which it might be more useful to think of as nonrealism. An important part of the excitement and interest of both media is the active interplay between the elements which can be defined as realist, and the others which function simultaneously and have either a nonrealist character (primarily formal, linguistic or conventional) or one which can be called antirealist because the character of its formal, linguistic or conventional procedures specifically or explicitly tries to counteract the cognitive dimensions we have linked with realism.

To give examples of these different combinations: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944) combines realism and antirealism. At the same time it is multiply realist – on all three levels of emotional truth, interest in appearances and deep analytical structure – *and* antirealist, in that it makes these levels coexist with elements of music, song and dance which simultaneously translate the work to a different level, the main concerns of which are show and performance. A strong link between the two sides is emotion, with which each side deals heavily and in depth, but it is not always precisely the same emotion, and its strength does not have the effect of collapsing the articulations between the film's aspects. In fact it can be argued that the film is dynamic precisely because it is doing both different things at once, and that criticism has some difficulty in deciding whether one side is more important than the other. Are character, discovery, fulfilment (the realist sides of the equation) more weighty than orchestrated performance (the antirealist)? In any case the social meaning of the work (and of the experience of

29 Todorov, quoted in Corner, 'Presumption as theory', p. 99. His remarks on Todorov and genre are very concise and deserve expansion.

30 They converge on the J.-L. Godard, J.-P. Gorin 1972 film in MacCabe, *Realism and the Cinema*, p. 26, and Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* (1993), p. 437.

31 Christopher Williams (ed.), *Realism and the Cinema: a Reader* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul/British Film Institute, 1980), p. 4: 'The two concepts have lived off each other . . . if they are opposites they tend to be inter-penetrating opposites.'

watching it) should be approached through this central combination rather than through contextual remarks about the significance of the family.[32]

[32] See Bordwell and Thompson's discussion of the film in *Film Art* (1993), pp. 424–30.

Many social issue and social drama films combine realist material (situations, characters and conflicts to varying extents) with nonrealist devices and conventions. Thus *Gervaise* (1956), René Clément's version of Zola's novel *L'Assommoir*, chooses the heightened intensity of melodrama, not as an ironic comment on the novel's material but as authorizing a substitute set of conventions into which it and its language can be adapted. Zola's language and procedures, often traduced, in the wake of Lukács and his distinction between narration and description, as 'merely naturalistic' are in fact full of intensity and reflection. One can imagine several different ways of translating them into film terms, some of which might be antirealistic, attempting to create a space of images to substitute a different visual experience for the literary and intellectual intensity of the novel's text. To some extent this is what happens in Franju's version of *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1970).

De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) is an astute blending of realistic elements – the work-and-theft situation, the central characters, the social relations and some aspects of the ways they are shown – with antirealist ones – the tragic structure, the frequent parallels, the architectural qualities of the treatment, the music. Joseph H. Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1949) is essentially a nonrealist film – the emblematic quality of its screenplay and dramatization, a degree of detachment from the issues presented, the acting, certain features which follow from the cheapness of the production values – but with striking forays into realism – moments of directness and intensity, especially in relation to the central characters – *and* into antirealism – the simplicity of the narrative structure, the stylized effects produced by the combination of a noirish visual style with the budgetary restrictions already mentioned, the staging of the final sequence set in a mist-shrouded swamp.

Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) deals mainly in different realist strands set alongside each other: interior (individual) psychic situation; intercharacter relation; sexuality; social situation; cultural situation and relations; landscape; the specifically British concern with focusing on the group or social dimensions of problems; but it does also include some nonrealist elements. Its presentation of the Arthur Seaton character goes some way towards encouraging the sort of intensity of involvement more commonly associated with other national cinemas (including that of the USA), and this is further accentuated by the performance of the actor Albert Finney, who gives the persona the same sort of luminous quality as is achieved by the musical performers in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. A clever balance is maintained between this brightness and the search for a kind of objectivity, which in *Saturday*

Night and Sunday Morning means that the relations between the film's different parts are well organized so as simultaneously to entertain, to tell a story, to discuss a state of affairs and to raise questions about it. This specific set of objectives is typical of the aspirations of much British realist filmmaking; but my more basic point is that it is important to recognize that the varied patterns of realism, nonrealism and antirealism evident in the five films briefly discussed here tell us quite a lot about the survival and necessity of realism.

As far as television theory and television studies are concerned, realism was clearly never, by itself, either the 'defining aesthetic' or the 'social project' of the medium.[33] In *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Raymond Williams established that television was the combination and development of pre-existing cultural, communicative and artistic forms, but that it had also invented new, primarily *mixed* ones, such as drama-documentary, education by means of seeing, discussion in the form of chat shows, features (typically combining documentary with the journal or the essay) and free-ranging, self-reflexive *and* referential shows like *Sesame Street*.[34] John Fiske has demonstrated how the concept of 'flow', which Williams developed from trying to think about programming, implicitly contained within it the more appropriate one of segmentation – which was later developed by Fiske and Hartley, by Newcomb, by John Ellis and by Robert C. Allen.[35]

One might have imagined that the presence of these ideas would have been enough to prevent, or at least restrain the belief in realism as television's defining project. How could a monolithic, controlling realism be thought to be operating in such a multiple, heterogeneous, segmented field? The explanation lies not in Corner's 'loose generalism' or 'unmonitored expansion' (of the notion of realism), but in a mixture of intellectual and administrative decisions, most of which were wrong or inadequate. Firstly, the teaching of television, like that of most other modern media except film, was subordinated to questions of institutions and policy, with problems of aesthetics, communication and consumption taken for granted, barely tolerated or relegated to a sphere of triviality. The ready-made theory of realism, or 'naturalism' to which it was sometimes further reduced, lamely filled the gap caused by this lack of interest.

Secondly, there was a strong current of need (sometimes more psychic than political) to approach television through a political framework. This often took the forms either of reading the generality of television output as the product of an undesirable regime (for example capitalism, mass society, bourgeois society or patriarchy) or of demanding that interest in any aspect of it should primarily be oppositional. This was complemented by a technically-based interest in the medium's mechanics which was not

33 Corner, 'Presumption as theory', p. 98.

34 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974), pp. 44–77.

35 John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London: Methuen, 1978); John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, 'Television as a cultural forum', reprinted in Newcomb (ed.), *Television: the Critical View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1985); John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987).

enough to enliven the not very political quality of the political involvement.

Thirdly, the concept of ideology was used to buttress both the institutional and the pseudopolitical approaches to the study of television. As it was already moribund, its application to television did not help produce any critical ideas. But unfortunately it had a built-in residual appeal to intellectuals of several different tendencies: sociological, institutional, economic, formalist, semiotic, psychoanalytic and even avant-gardist. It fulfilled the verbal function of providing a totemic guarantee of the supposed social nature or quality of their discourses (even where they were not dealing with the social at all or referring to it in only the most perfunctory manner).

Finally, television studies had the misfortune to develop in a period in which intellectual rigour was in short supply. People were, sympathetically, interested in difficult and unusual ideas for their own sake. Unfortunately, there was also a tendency to go for broad general notions which were not so difficult and ended up by being pretty usual. The road to an adequate theory and criticism of television will pass through more plural accounts of societies and cultures, and more specific accounts of television procedures, language and modes of consumption. These accounts will also pay heed to the openness and the closure in television work, its segmentation and articulation. They will not be talking about ideology, but they will discuss the ways television uses realist conventions among others.

reports

British Film Industry Conference, London, 8 November 1993

Since Margaret Thatcher chaired a Downing Street seminar on the British film industry in June 1990, the case for supporting British film production has continued to be made to government. The evolution of government policy on film has, however, proved fraught. Having been belatedly converted to the cause of the British film industry, Mrs Thatcher was replaced as Conservative Prime Minister, only five months later, by John Major. A general election, which many thought Labour might win, then ensued in April 1992. After the election, the new Conservative administration, in a welcome move, reorganized the responsibility for film, along with the arts and sport, into a new Ministry of National Heritage under the 'Minister for Fun', David Mellor, a figure generally regarded as sympathetic to the film industry. However, in the wake of a series of damaging financial and sexual revelations, Mellor was forced to resign in September 1992, replaced by the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke (a 'liberal' Tory but one less well known for his interest in film).

Despite these changes in personnel and the obstacles to continuity of policy which have resulted, the government has started, nonetheless, to develop a more constructive approach towards British film production than was evident during the Thatcher years, dominated as they were by the shibboleths of 'free market' economics.[1] Since the Downing Street seminar, the government has partly retreated from its aggressively noninterventionist stance and set up the British Film Commission, established the European Co-production Fund, renewed the funding for British Screen Finance until 1996 and, after futile efforts to attract private finance, paid the subscription to Eurimages, the Council of Europe's production and distribution support fund. In 1992, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, also announced a small measure of accelerated tax relief for filmmakers. However, important as these developments have been, they have not yet been sufficiently substantial to halt the long-term decline of the British production sector.

Although the number of UK films made in 1992 was, at forty-seven, only slightly less than the average for the 1980s, it was well below the average for previous decades and also compared unfavourably with other European countries such as France (which made 155 films in 1992) and Italy (which made 127). The level of investment in these films was also relatively modest and it has been estimated that investment in UK production in 1992 amounted to only forty-three per cent of the 1984 total.[2] This means, of course, that the average budget of British films has also fallen, which is itself a reflection of their increasingly weak market position. Thus, in 1992, Hollywood films accounted for over ninety per cent of UK box office whereas British films (excluding those with a US involvement) collected only 6.8 per cent.[3]

It is against this background of production difficulties that the BFI/CBI conference on the British film industry took place. Its aims were to examine the problems that the industry faced and to identify what policies might assist in restoring the industry's fortunes. However, as befitted a conference co-hosted by the CBI, the agenda which the opening speakers set proved unhelpfully narrow. The Deputy Director of the CBI, Maurice Hunt, introduced the morning session with a reminder that the CBI was a business organization which did not 'take a stand about the cultural things in life' and regarded the film industry as an industry like any other. Professor John Kay, chair of London Economics, continued in the same

'philistine vein' (his own words) by observing that British films, in economic terms, are less important than submarine cables. However, if this is so – and films really are to be regarded as no different from submarine cables – it is not at all clear that the economic arguments stand up.

Kay's specific topic was 'Balancing audiovisual trade', an issue of particular relevance given the talks surrounding GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) which were then taking place. As Kay argued, the imbalance in audiovisual trade between the USA and the countries of the European Union (formerly Community) has increased dramatically in the last few years. Thus, according to figures in *The Guardian*, US exports (including film, video and television) to Europe amounted to $3.7 billion in 1992 whereas European exports to the USA reached only $288 million.[4] However, if European policy is to be guided solely by the precepts of liberal economics, as Kay recommended, then it is unlikely that this trend will be significantly reversed. Indeed, the most notable feature of the GATT agreement which was finally reached in December 1993 was that it excluded the audiovisual industries, thus making explicit that these are not simply industries like any other but also ones of major cultural importance which require some form of economic protection. In the case of film, the economic power of Hollywood *vis-à-vis* other national film industries is now so substantial and linked to so many factors (the scale of their production, the concentration of resources and deal-making activity in Los Angeles, the size and relative homogeneity of the US home market, the successful penetration of ancillary markets, and the ownership and control of an international network of distribution and exhibition interests) that there is little realistic prospect of the European audiovisual industries competing on equal terms. However, if as the agreement over GATT appears to concede, the European audiovisual industries as a whole are not adequately equipped to cope with the full rigours of the 'free market' then surely this must also apply to what remains of the British film industry.[5]

Indeed, what has effectively kept the British film industry afloat has been the contribution of television, which since the mid 1980s has proved the most significant source of production finance for British films. However, what is notable about television's investment in film is that it has not been undertaken primarily for commercial reasons but, especially in the case of Channel Four and the BBC, out of a sense of public service commitment. As a result, the bulk of British films financed by television are, in effect, 'subsidized' insofar as few of them make a profit when assessed in conventional commercial terms. To this extent, the panel on 'Television and Britain's film industry', which carried on the day's proceedings, inevitably undercut the strictly 'economic' agenda which the opening speakers had sought to set. Of the three panellists – Channel Four's Head of Drama, David Aukin, the BBC's Head of Films, Mark Shivas, and BSkyB's Head of Programmes, David Elstein – only Elstein could be said to represent strictly commercial interests and, even here, the case was not clear cut. Elstein reported on his negotiations, subsequently concluded, with British Screen for pay-television rights to their films. However, although this was presented as primarily a business deal, it was also apparent that BSkyB's movie channels (with less than twenty per cent of European material) have fallen a long way short of the EU's *Television without Frontiers* directive on European programming. The British Screen deal will, in this respect, go some way towards increasing the European content of BSkyB's channels and help assuage the DNH (itself under pressure from the European Union) which has been demanding improvements in this direction from the satellite stations.

A continued cultural commitment to film was also evident in the contributions of Mark Shivas and David Aukin. Shivas explained the policy of the new BBC films department which aims to coproduce about five new features each year, as well as invest in other independently-produced British features. The distinguishing characteristic of this strategy, compared to previous BBC policy, is that such features are planned from the start to have full theatrical and video releases. In this way, it is hoped to avoid the distribution problems which previous BBC features have faced as a result of the pressures for an early television transmission. While pointing out that the BBC's drama budget was almost as large as the *whole* of Channel Four's programme spend (just over £200 million in 1992), David Aukin nonetheless confirmed the channel's commitment to supporting twelve to fifteen features each year. He did, however, indicate that there would be a greater concern with 'commercial viability' than there had possibly been in the past. This is hardly surprising. At the start of 1993 the channel became responsible for selling its own advertising and has been placed in much more direct competition with the independent television companies than hitherto. This initially led to fears that there would be pressure to reduce programme costs and provide less 'protection' to culturally prestigious, but relatively 'uneconomic', programming such as Film on Four. This has not yet proved the case but there is no doubt that Channel Four's commitment to film in the future will depend much more directly on its ability to generate advertising revenues and ratings.

Indeed, the implications of greater 'commercialism' in broadcasting can already be seen in the case of the ITV companies. During the 1980s, ITV companies such as Central, Granada and Thames increasingly followed the example of Channel Four and ventured into feature production, becoming involved in twenty productions between 1985 and 1989. There was, however, an incentive for them to do so insofar as the levy arrangements at the time encouraged investment in film as a form of 'tax shelter'. Since then, the changes imposed upon the broadcasting system by the Conservative government, including competitive bidding for franchises and the introduction of payments to the Treasury on the basis of advertising revenues, have led to a reduction in the amount of money available for programme making and a removal of the incentives to invest in film. This has meant that companies such as Granada have abandoned their plans for film production and ITV investment in British films has virtually disappeared. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the restoration of some form of incentives to ITV companies to invest in film (such as relief on annual payments liability) were among the proposals presented to the conference in the afternoon.

These proposals were presented by three main speakers – the director of the BFI, Wilf Stevenson, the chair of the BFI, film producer Jeremy Thomas, and the director of Demos, Geoff Mulgan – and were also to be found in the BFI booklet launched on the same day, *Hollywood of Europe?: The Future of British Film*.[6] Many of these proposals in turn appeared to be the product of the lobbying of government which has continued to take place since the Downing Street seminar (most recently via the 'Film Strategy Group'). The proposals themselves were wide ranging and included recommendations for various kinds of tax relief, the introduction of levies (on both cinema tickets and videos), the use of VAT differentials, a 'blockbuster' tax and, as already indicated, various incentives to television to invest in film. It was these proposals, and especially those concerning levies and a 'blockbuster' tax, which brought the conference alight and also served to highlight one of the key problems which any reforms of the industry must face.

What the term the 'British film industry' disguises is that there is now no common interest which unites the industry. Since the mid 1980s, there has been no British company involved in all aspects of the film business (such as Rank and ABPC once were) with the result that there has been a bad split in the industry between producers on the one hand and distributors and exhibitors on the other. The distribution and exhibition sectors of the industry, moreover, make most of their money from the showing of Hollywood films and therefore have little interest in the promotion of British films. This was reflected in the responses to the conference proposals from the representatives of these sectors who were in attendance. John Wilkinson of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, for example, denounced the proposals as simply a way for the production sector to 'grab money' from exhibitors and distributors, and this view received support from the representatives of Rank who candidly admitted their preference for both showing and investing in Hollywood films. As was demonstrated by the failure of the working party on the structure of the industry (set up in the wake of the Downing Street seminar) to agree recommendations, there are, in fact, very few reforms around which the industry can unite. Distributors and exhibitors are only really likely to agree to fiscal reforms, such as tax relief or the abolition of the witholding tax on visiting artists, which can be implemented without cost to them (but which will of course cost the Treasury who have been reluctant to offer any 'special treatment' to film). However, it may well be that the pendulum is swinging against the distributors and exhibitors and that they will have some changes imposed upon them. Indeed, a part of the edginess in evidence at the conference undoubtedly derived from the fact that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) had only recently announced an investigation into the distribution of films to UK cinemas. Although the MMC found evidence of monopoly in both distribution and exhibition when it last investigated the industry in 1983, it undertook few remedial actions. As a result, there has continued to be a substantial concentration of interests in both the exhibition and distribution sectors which has tended to work in favour of US films and against the bulk of independently-produced British films.

Given these circumstances, it is unlikely that the conference could have expected to find much common ground. On the other hand, it was rather depressing that an event devoted to finding a way forward for British film production should have ended in something of a dogfight between the different industry interests. And, given the potentially controversial character of some of the proposals, it would surely have been sensible to present them with a greater sense of strategy. There certainly seemed something indiscriminate in the way the proposals were piled on top of each other, almost regardless of the likelihood of their implementation. Clearly, some proposals appear to be rather better bets than others and a stronger political sense of the gains which are realistically possible in the short to medium term would have helped to give the conference a clearer focus.

Nonetheless, there is still a strong expectation in film circles that the government is on the verge of launching a new film initiative and that this year may herald the appearance of a green or white paper. Indeed, there was even some speculation before the conference that, as a government spokesperson had been billed to appear, the occasion might be used to make an official announcement. In the event, the promised spokesperson failed to show. After so much waiting, it is to be hoped that British filmmakers will not be faced with a similar letdown.

John Hill

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2 See 'UK film, television and video: statistical overview with a commentary by Terry Ilott', *BFI Film and Television Handbook 1994* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), pp. 20–21.

3 Ibid., p. 42.

4 'Gatt: the movie', *The Guardian*, 8 December 1993, p. 21.

5 For a clear-sighted overview of the British film industry's competitive disadvantage within the international film economy, see Steve McIntyre, 'Vanishing point: feature film production in a small country' in John Hill, Martin McLoone and Paul Hainsworth (eds), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (London/Belfast: British Film Institute/Institute of Irish Studies, 1994).

6 Geoff Mulgan and Richard Paterson (eds), *Hollywood of Europe? The Future of British Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1993).

We are here but are we queer?: Lesbian Filmmaking versus Queer Cinema Conference, London, 12 March 1994

Heterosociety, imprisoned by monogamy in the ruins of romantic love, is quite dumbfounded when faced with our plurality. We are the 11,000 angels dancing on the head of a pin.
Derek Jarman (1942–1994).[1]

I was delighted with the plurality of this conference (organized by Eva Weber at the Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmith's College) evident in the variety of the film clips, the audience and the contributors. Early on in the proceedings, historian and filmmaker Andrea Weiss (*Before Stonewall* [USA, 1985]) outlined what she saw as the two main tendencies of lesbian film over the past twenty years: the narrative/documentary line allied to radical politics (out of Jan Oxenburgh, *Home Movie* [USA, 1972]) and the avant garde (Barbara Hammer, *Dyketactics* [USA, 1974]), allied to cultural feminism.[2] The conference demonstrated to me that the present situation is far more diverse and showing signs of maturation, despite the appalling lack of resources lesbian filmmakers have to contend with. But it did not convince me that 'queer' cinema, if it exists at all, has anything really new to offer lesbians and women in general.

Held one week before the Eighth London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, was this really the first national conference in Britain devoted to lesbian filmmaking? Nobody I asked among the sixty or so participants knew of another. Among the good things about this one was the substantial presence of women of colour (almost a quarter of the participants) and the fact that as a result of their ad hoc workshop, they set up a contact group. But how much was gained by taking 'queer' as a reference point rather than, say, postcolonialism, difference or feminism is a moot point.

I am amazed that queer lesbians will argue that it does not matter *who* makes films, and that to say that it *does* is 'essentialist'. Where would our understanding be of how women are positioned in Hollywood without Dorothy Arzner? Would a film like *Christopher Strong* (USA, 1933) ever have been made? Material and social conditions are especially pertinent to film, from money to recent feminist understandings of the body. By all means let straight men deal seriously with lesbian subject matter; but what they produce has different meanings within cinema as a whole,

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especially when under present 'market' conditions and ideologies there is perceived to be room for only a limited amount of gay subject matter.

The issue was made abundantly clear by both Pratibha Parmar and Inge Blackman, who stressed the greater access to resources gay men have in comparison to lesbians, and how this disparity ensures that 'queer' merely reflects the usual lesbian invisibility. Andrea Weiss and Cherry Smyth also saw the lack of resources as a major stumbling block to their readiness to apply the tenets of 'queer' cinema to lesbian filmmaking.

Weiss and Smyth gave the two morning presentations, and their approaches brought out for me a sense of the different generations of lesbian film and film criticism. I asked them if this was right and they thought it was. We have to look at this historically, and avoid reproducing the 'generation gap' of the straight family. It is dangerous for women to romanticize overthrowing their past if this means rejecting the insights of earlier generations of women – and I doubt if the dismissive 'anything goes' brand of 'queer' is much help. Politically-aware queer thinking, as argued for by Joseph Bristow and Angelia Wilson and several of their contributors to *Activating Theory* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), is another matter.

Weiss structured her talk around a clip from Su Friedrich's *Damned if you don't* (USA, 1987), demonstrating how, over the years, lesbian filmmakers have deployed the varying perspectives of lesbian desire to explore the erotic outside the pornographic mode. Her reminder that it was the New Right, moving in on feminist antipornography strategies, that realigned the debates as pro- or antisex, was very timely. It was sobering to hear what filmmakers like Barbara Hammer, Su Friedrich, Jan Oxenburgh, Lizzie Borden and Sheila McLaughlin were doing now: Hammer and Friedrich are still making self-financed, non-synch films, Sheila has no funding, and Lizzie Borden (*Born in Flames* [USA, 1983]) is married to a producer and works successfully as a director in straight Hollywood. Well.

Smyth, although she remains a libertarian, seems to be more sceptical about queer since writing her widely-read pamphlet, *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992). I do not agree with her that sexual explicitness is transgressive either because of the silencing of sex or for any other reason. There are plenty of arguments after Foucault to suggest that putting sex into discourse is itself both widespread and problematic, and explicitness may do nothing to end the denial of the variety of lesbian and women's sexuality. This does not mean that I favour censorship, but rather, as Annette Kuhn argues, that I think the whole way in which the relation between cinema, sexuality and censorship is understood should be reframed, since 'controversiality may be produced as an attribute of representations, an attribute which sanctions certain gestures of censorship'.[3] I also question whether those who simultaneously reject Freud and see the portrayal of physical sex as so vital to our culture have thought enough about who it was placed sex and scopophilia centrestage in psychic development. The conference concerned itself very little with detailed considerations of sexuality, however, and though some explicit and some sadomasochistic material was screened, most of the discussion bypassed it.

Though Weiss and Smyth were mainly there as critics, they, like all the other speakers, have themselves been involved in filming. The day was structured around their presentations' film clips, and included reasonable time for discussion. The exception were the after-lunch workshops on topics such as 'Issues of identity', 'What does the audience want?', 'The realities of lesbian filmmaking' and 'Queer cinema – assimilation or contest?' It all worked well, and the

organizers' choice of a variety of short clips made it possible, despite the inevitable frustrations, to see the breadth of material around. Together with the marked differences between featured filmmakers Inge Blackman, Pratibha Parmar, Ruth Novaczek and Sarah Turner, the material showed that, though still small-scale, lesbian film now has both historical and contemporary range. It was great to hear an experimental formalist like Sarah Turner (*She Wanted Green Lawns* [UK, 1987]) fruitfully discussing lesbian film on the same panel as a documentarist like Inge Blackman (*Raga Gyal D'bout* [UK, 1993]).

Turner questioned the way supporters of queer tend to trash feminism and 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. She drily observed that 'angst is out' and 'the feelgood factor is in' in the new queer. Her films were art films, made for herself, unapologetically as an artist. It was a great pleasure to hear quality, accessible and nonantagonistic debate from the panel, with no false coyness over intellectual engagement or formal difficulty. I have long been an admirer of Parmar, and both the book and the film *Warrior Marks* (UK, 1993)[4] are a great antidote to the use of queerness as an easy solution to problems of sexuality. But I had not seen anything by Novaczek (hobbies: suffering, opera singing, smoking) before, and I loved it. Her successive images in *Cheap Philosophy* (UK, 1993) of herself in different guises and costumes, ruminating on Jewish and lesbian philosophy were hilarious. Picture a deadpan face, a voice saying, 'She said you're a tragic Jew', the reaction just a twitch of the eyebrows, 'You're not even like Cher'. Looking with Jewish humour at Jewish faces, Ruth's satirical 'postpostmodernistsemiqueermishmash' angle on the gay style which glorifies Aryan men, leads her to bring the Talmudic debating dialectic to bear on white, male Christianity. This is not as complicated as I have made it sound. In these times of the resurgence of the Right, it is very exciting to see lesbian work which is a seriously funny subversion of fascism. There is no way these filmmakers allow themselves to be relegated to a privatized contemplation of lesbian identities and sexualities.

Parmar pointed out that if you create an inclusive category like 'queer', then exclude one group from it, that category becomes defunct. This was the problem with the 'new queer historiography' that B. Ruby Rich saw represented at the Sundance Festival 1992; apart from Sadie Benning, there were no women. In her view, 'queer' cinema had been going on for decades. The difference was that young and beautiful white gayboys were now a marketable commodity. Parma stressed the diversity of elements in her own filmmaking – Indian pop promos, 1970s avant garde, soap – and saw two main disadvantages in the notion of 'queer'. The first was the general wish not to be constrained by categories, and the second, her rejection of any essentializing idea of a 'gay gaze'. I do not know if she thought any idea of a gay gaze was necessarily essentializing but, as with other forms of cinema, including the female–male division on which feminist analyses of the gaze have been based, a gay gaze can be understood in social terms. This immediately exposes one of the difficulties with 'queer'; one which reflects the issue of resources within filmmaking. The immense inequalities between lesbian and gay men's social conditions, experience and histories make it very hard to apply to present actuality.

Where 'queer' is possibly more useful is in moving towards reconceptualizing gendered cultural forms. A member of the audience asked Parmar her opinion of the idea of lesbian camp. Novaczek said that it offered her a way of reconnecting with the Jewish women of her childhood; are Jewish women camp? Blackman extended it further still, to black camp, reading the exaggerated and parodic styles of Raga and Jamaican male

homoeroticism as high camp. This was part of why black women listen to the supposedly misogynist Raga music. White gay men do not notice the celebration of 'mumpy' – darker, big black women. It creates problems when there are so few films that each one is expected to 'bear the burden of representation'. In the end, Blackman's loyalty was 'to the vision of my film'.

The overall mood of the day seemed to be that 'queer' could be a name for a something many people wish to see, but few can bring into focus. It would not stick, and it often tended to make the issues facing lesbians less clear and to stall debate. As a definition, most of the speakers found it too loose; as an identity, it had no constituency; as a mode of filmmaking, it had no clear examples. So it has potential, rather than actual, meaning. Its use, therefore, may be transformative. It may be that it offers a glimpse of a way of conceptualizing an altered cinema, one able to accommodate lesbian filmmaking, and that will be its legacy and its meaning. It is not yet that cinema in itself.

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Pordenone Silent Film Festival, 9–16 October 1993

The 12th Pordenone Silent Film Festival divided its attention between different sections: 1913 vintage (films made in 1913 all over the world); Aotearoa and the sentimental strine: making films in New Zealand and Australia; The conquering filmmaker: Rex Ingram; Crazy like a fox: Charley Chase; and Italy rediscovered.

The section devoted to Ingram, which was almost a complete retrospective of his work in the 1920s, was entitled 'The painter of apocalypse', which offered a strong interpretation of Ingram's style, emphasizing his figurative ability. Reginald Ingram Montgomery Hitchcock was born in Ireland in 1893, the son of a learned clergyman who instilled in him a vein of nonconfessional spirituality, and a passion for boxing. His mother, a well-to-do Englishwoman, taught him and his brother to appreciate art and music. He was a cultivated young man who studied law at Dublin's Trinity college; he was handsome, temperamental and good at drawing. When he emigrated to the USA he was not pushed towards the New World by economic conditions, such as the famine of 1847, like many of his compatriots; indeed he studied sculpture at Yale, supporting himself by working as a freight clerk in New Haven's railroad yards. By chance, he met Edison's son and started working in the movies in New York, first as an actor/set designer/screenwriter at Vitagraph and Fox. Later he went to Universal, as a director/writer/producer. In his apprenticeship he experienced the plurality of roles, in the days before a more scientific division of labour in the studio system. Ingram fought in World War I in the Canadian Air Force and was badly wounded in a crash; an accident which, perhaps, influenced his work, with its elegant amalgam of action and reflection. It was only in the early 1920s, at Metro, that his career as a director took off. Screenwriter June

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Mathis insisted that he direct her adaptation of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), in which Valentino was to make his debut. The critical and commercial success of the film opened up a brilliant career, characterized by titles of what, at first sight, appears to be spectacular Hollywood fare, such as *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922) and *Scaramouche* (1923). The figurative beauty of his films and his firm control of all the typical ingredients of Hollywood cuisine – stars, narrative construction, genres and so on – are impressive, mostly for their apparent ease. His is a spectacular cinema in which the gigantism of the sets and the films' exceptional length (many of them last more than the traditional ninety minutes) are not immediately perceived, because they are presented with the lightness of touch of a digested culture.

The talent he had shown and the success he had achieved made him the most obvious candidate for directing the screen adaptation of *Ben Hur* (Fred Niblo, 1925), another ambitious and complex project developed by June Mathis. His disappointment at not being assigned to direct this picture greatly contributed to Ingram's estrangement from Hollywood. In 1924, he and Alice Terry left for Europe and established production facilities on the French Riviera, working for MGM. This experiment in semi-independent production, which made him part of the international filmmaking community, did not last long, because he did not get along very well with his staff. Furthermore, the introduction of sound created technical difficulties. *Baroud* (1932) was, in fact, Ingram's only sound film, shot on location in North Africa. This professional choice was associated with an existential crisis: it seems that he abandoned Christianity, probably for Islam, towards the end of his life. He 'retired' from filmmaking and lived for a while in North Africa. It was a rigorous ethical choice – a choice of 'diversity' – very unusual for a film director at the height of his career. He returned to Hollywood in 1936, and devoted his time to travelling, sculpting and writing novels. He died in 1950, without directing any more films.

From a figurative point of view, Ingram's films are notable not so much for their imaginative power, or their visual emphasis on set decoration, but for their meticulous accuracy of detail. In a film by Ingram one could never find those incongruities of costume, architecture and landscape that are sometimes to be found in works even by European directors in Hollywood. The beautiful prints projected onto the screen at Pordenone allow us to observe another peculiarity of his style: Ingram builds the shot in a very traditional way, with a taste for symmetry and taking pleasure in strong composition, with arches and gates harmoniously framing the shot and the main buildings or objects at the centre of the frame. It is this clarity that makes the images effective, without a vulgar exhibition of production values, transforming decor into a functional and elegant narrative element. This passion for verisimilitude (and his dislike of Hollywood) encouraged him, in the latter part of his career, to make films mostly on location, especially after he moved to the French Riviera in 1924. He shot *The Arab* (1924) and *The Garden of Allah* in North Africa, and *Mare Nostrum* (1925) in Naples.

With regard to film genres, it could be said that Ingram knew how to use their recipes, but added unusual ingredients: mysticism in a love story such as *Garden of Allah*; youthful political idealism in *Scaramouche*; reasons of state in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. His ethical dimension, however, is sublimated by the narrative and in the visuals. At first sight it is difficult to perceive that these are not regular swashbuckling pictures or exotic epics, because, for example, in *The Garden of Allah*, the mysticism is transferred to the landscape.

Unusual details or characters often appear in his films: from midgets to monstrous fat

men, from animal characters, such as Valentino's little monkey in *Four Horsemen*, to the Governor with an ugly, big nose in *Scaramouche*, and the grotesque German soldiers dancing in women's clothes, in *Four Horsemen*. These details seems to be indications of an increasingly pronounced disturbance in this seemingly harmonious world – a disturbance which is later resolved in mysticism.

One is impressed, however, by Ingram's great professionalism and by his mastery of all the skills necessary for his work (which makes it even more difficult to understand his early retirement). He was a great developer of talent: in *Four Horsemen*, he introduced Valentino in the memorable tango scene, giving him the chance to show different dimensions in his interpretation, from the great seducer to the young artist, from the rich spoiled brat to the noble lover: a variety of roles and interpretive possibilities he was never to be given again. Ingram also 'developed' Ramon Novarro, who had gone unnoticed as an extra, until his debut in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. When played by Valentino and Novarro, Ingram's young heroes are different from most of their colleagues: less athletic and vigorous than a Douglas Fairbanks, they have a free and easy grace, with traits of fragility and tenderness, which indicates the presence of far less simplistic male stereotypes than in classical Hollywood cinema.

The constant presence in Ingram's films is his wife, Alice Terry – a blonde woman with blue eyes, a damsel in distress. Attractive for her virtues and homely sweetness, she is totally lacking in erotic tension, without even the predestined victim-eroticism of Lillian Gish. In this respect, her role in *The Magician* (1926) – perhaps Ingram's greatest picture – is typical. Terry is a sculptor who, while working on a gigantic statue of a faun, is crushed by it and paralyzed. A young American doctor saves her, but a dark hypnotist, played by Paul Wegener, of the expressionist *Golem*, kidnaps her. He takes her to his castle, to use the virginal blood of her heart for one of his crazy alchemic experiments. The film was made in 1926 and therefore predates *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. All the elements of classical horror pictures are narratively and figuratively already developed in this film: the gothic atmosphere; the menacing castle on the mountain; the spiral staircase; the village living in terror; the crippled servant; the juxtaposition of the fiancée, a doctor, and the magician, a vampire (as she visualizes him in an hallucination, in which he tries to suck the blood from her throat). *The Magician* is also an example of the integration of Hollywood cinema and expressionism, revealed both by the decor and by Wegener's acting. At the climax, the magician cuts the girl's dress at the breast to extract her heart, but this gesture does not provoke an erotic shudder in the theatre. This lack of sensuality is both due to Terry's persona and to the baggy dress she wears: her dress is the antithesis of the siren's sheath of Italian *divas* – women who remain in our imaginary due to the intense *presence* of their bodies. This is never expressed by Ingram's heroines.

The Italian silent cinema is always present on Pordenone's screens. This year its presence was particularly significant, 'favoured' by the choice of 1913, as Italian cinema was at that time one of the most advanced. Characterized by the great historical spectacles and by melodrama dominated by the *diva*, it had not yet forgotten the importance of narrative structure. On the contrary, some Italian films even challenged literary domination, adapting the bestsellers of the time, such as *Quo Vadis*, and creating a D'Annunzio style on the screen, which was not yet as stylized on paper.

In Pordenone, Italian cinema of 1913 was represented by *Vittoria o morte*, an adventure–espionage picture with a young

heroine chasing the thief of her father's documents by every possible means of transportation, even parachuting herself from an aeroplane into a boat, challenging *The Perils of Pauline* on its very own ground.

In a sense, even *Quo Vadis* (Enrico Guazzoni) is an adventure film, because it never crushes the narrative under the weight of gigantic sets and oceanic masses, *Aida*-style. Contrary to what we have later seen in de Mille, the film does not emphasize the erotic potential of the vision of the half-naked Licia, tied onto the bull, and saved by the strong man, Ursus. The film stresses instead the disquieting presence of the masses, blandished and manipulated by Neroesque despots, but also by aristocratic politicians such as Petronius. In those days, the masses were making their way onto the Italian political scene but were held back by limited suffrage. The liberal aristocracy was already dealing with the spirit of a histrionic dictator, in the guise of poet–soldier D'Annunzio, who prefigured Mussolini. The war in Libya had already mobilized the nationalistic imaginary and launched D'Annunzio as a charismatic leader. Fascism is anticipated in *Quo Vadis* also by the exhibition of an Imperial Rome, shown in its relation to the colonized people – the slaves. The difficulties imposed by the Pope's veto against Catholic participation in politics is recalled by the representation of the Christians in the catacombs, that is, showing their ideological counterorganization. In this respect, the film presents an intriguing shot: in the scene of Vinicus' baptism, a hammer and sickle appear in the background. Given the accuracy of the decor, it is hard to believe that their presence could be accidental. In the final scene, in fact, Christ is shown freeing the slaves from their chains, in a gesture which underlines the novel's Christian theme of solidarity – a theme never stressed in other adaptations of *Quo Vadis*.

The masses are present on the silent screen as a menace not only in Italian pictures, but in other national cinemas as well. Before World War I, they represented an incumbent danger – a menace to the liberal or democratic state, because of the difficulty of integrating them into the new political rituals; of transforming them in something more than a mass of extras. In the 1920s the masses continue to appear as a menacing mob, because of the echoes of the Soviet Revolution, which disturbed the imaginaries of the entire world, as innumerable scenes of the French Revolution recall, in Ingram's *Scaramouche*, for example.

Italian cinema at Pordenone often restages the Borelli/Bertini match; this year's result was a draw. Borelli was present with a masterpiece of Italian silent cinema, *Ma l'amor mio non muore*, by Mario Caserini (1913), which is the summa of melodrama of the time, and a perfect star vehicle. In the beautiful clarity of the restored print, Borelli can be seen and admired in every little gesture, and in the embroideries and delicate prints of her elegant clothes. Even though the film's storyline encourages a dynamic rhythm (it is, after all, a spy picture with the usual stolen documents, secret agents in disguise, an exiled prince and so on), the rhythm of the narrative is totally sacrificed to that of description, immolated on the altar of the most stylized expression. It is difficult to treat this film as a popular product, when the most evident cultural reference is to symbolist culture – to a floral iconography of refined taste, in which Borelli moves with no concession to naturalism, her hands moving as petals of blooming flowers, transforming herself into a statue of plastic sinuosity, with the weight of her body continuously moving from one foot to the other in an imaginary spiral. The film tells the story in long takes which appear very theatrical, especially since they are coupled with an obstinate refusal to give the spectator banal information such as the content of a letter or a newspaper article (unless, that is, these inserts are simply missing). There are some experimental

narrative procedures such as the lunch scene, when, in a long shot, the girl, her suitor and her father sit at the table, drink a sip, and get up – a visual synthesis of an irrelevant action. On the other hand, the film gives Borelli all the time she needs to express her despair over the death of her father and her separation from her lover, with a series of small gestures, existential languors and excitements of the soul, which it would be silly to consider 'excessive'.

Bertini appeared in a recently found film, *Il Processo Clemenceau*, which contains a brief appearance by a sixteen-year-old De Sica, cute and impudent. The film uses a complex narrative structure, in which the artist Clemenceau tells his story of love and death in a sense 'offscreen' through the use of intertitles. There is even a flashback within a flashback, a narrative procedure which is not at all banal for a film made in 1913. In this case the values are upset; Bertini and her acting abilities are subordinate to the narrative structure. She is allowed only a few seduction scenes in which she competes with Borelli in languors, with a very personal style which never gives in to naturalism but maintains efficacy of gesture. Sumptuous decor and sets, and clothes which do not have the natural elegance of Borelli's, indicate the emergence of a vein of vulgar exhibitionism, which can be followed through later Italian cinema.

Giuliana Muscio

review article:

Barrie Gunter and Mallory Wober, *The Reactive Viewer: a Review of Research on Audience Reaction Measurement.* London: John Libbey, 1992, 114pp.

Shaun Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: the Ethnography of Media Consumption.* London: Sage, 1993, 154pp.

Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (eds), *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces.* London: Routledge, 1992, 241pp.

PENELOPE HARVEY

Whatever the initial design intentions, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are now as integral to modern economies as they are to the domestic spaces that such economies have produced. The volume edited by Silverstone and Hirsch, which focuses particularly on the televisual media and home computers, makes the general point that despite the ubiquity of these devices, their meanings and uses cannot be assumed to correspond to the intentions of producers, nor can they be generalized across their very varied consumers. The technologies are not just material objects, they are forms of knowledge, media of social relations and entail social and symbolic processes. Their uses and meanings are complex, open-ended, contested and embedded in the minutiae of everyday life. It is not only academics but also, more crucially, the media and information industries who seek to know about these processes; who need to gauge their markets and measure their impact. Some might find it frustrating, others reassuring, to read that such effects are of course quite contradictory and ultimately unpredictable.

As might be expected in this relatively novel field of investigation, the contributors to *Consuming Technologies* represent a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds: communication studies, cultural studies, social anthropology, sociology, politics, social psychology, media studies and social policy. There is also diversity of a different kind in the contrast between theoretical and empirical contributions. These alternatives represent various perspectives on a common theme – the underlying rationale for most interdisciplinary research – yet the juxtapositions raise some interesting theoretical and methodological tensions. All the contributors seek to integrate the economic, the social and the cultural in their accounts of consuming technologies. However, it is clear that some approaches understand this integration as intrinsic and aim to describe it, while others take the social, the cultural and the economic as independent aspects of analysis and seek to explain by bringing parts together. My point is that the partial approaches do not necessarily add up to a greater whole but in many senses work against each other.

At the most basic level, contributors are drawing on very different understandings of culture. This difference affects both the use of analytical concepts such as 'domestic', 'social identity', 'gender' or 'generation', and also the methods employed by the researchers. In brief, these differences could be characterized as (i) a concern with how things mean and an appeal to social identity and cultural constructionism, (ii) a concern with technologies as media that produce and transform social relations rather than social identities and (iii) an acknowledgement of the indeterminacy of meaning and the intrinsic complexity of motivation. The articles do not divide neatly into these categories, which is interesting as it is the compatibility of these approaches which I wish to question.

The first of these approaches is typified by those who seek to discover the differences by gender and generation in the adoption of ICTs, and is the approach of the industries themselves. This approach requires that concepts such as gender and generation are taken as stable variables *a priori*, rather than emergent identities, and makes it possible to work with survey-style data that is collected by research assistants and subsequently analysed by the designer of the project. In a study of the appropriation of personal computers (Wheelock) interesting differences in usage by age and gender are produced and measured but this kind of study cannot ask other kinds of questions – such as the ways in which gender itself emerges as a dichotomized difference, or why the consumption of these technologies stresses this particular possible difference at the expense of others, or whether it is the nature of the research questions that produces this result. Do women watch television or use home computers as 'women', and how do we come to know that it is this subjective possibility that is brought into play by these activities? Articles vary on whether it is the technology, the user

identities or the domestic space itself which is constructed by the use of technologies, but in all cases we are looking at how meanings emerge as stable entities.

The continuity in this first approach is the way in which the ICTs are basically seen as objects with which people interact. The cultural constructs are the results of this interaction. The second approach which this collection illustrates, stresses the ways in which ICTs operate as media and are themselves communicative devices. Cockburn's article on the gendered nature of all technologies, while somewhat pre-empting discussion of the ways in which gender operates as a language of symbolic difference, does raise the important issue of the value-laden nature of the technologies that are introduced into domestic spaces. She also makes a useful distinction between the limitation of meanings due to social mechanisms, an approach that assumes relatively stable directing social interests, and meanings that are limited due to the far less tangible set of 'complex alliances' that constitute the biographies of particular objects and which inform an alternative emphasis on actor-networks.

This second approach also invites a consideration of the transformation of social relations, the effects of ICTs. The use of media and information technologies in domestic spaces does not simply reflect but is also constitutive of identities and relationships (Livingstone). This point is engagingly presented in the detailed case studies of section three, in which particular appropriations of technology are discussed: a very popular soap opera *The Young and the Restless* in Trinidad (Miller), the adoption of the telephone by the Amish (Umble) and the use of ICTs by a middle-class English family (Hirsch). These ethnographies are an important contribution to the volume as they give concrete instances of how ICTs offer different possibilities in different circumstances (Strathern) and how the evaluation of change or innovation in domestic spaces will depend on pre-existing (even coexisting) models of the domestic (Miller). The case studies illustrate the premise that the consumption of things produces social relations (Hirsch) and that the radical changes which ICTs might bring about are only visible in contexts which also reveal the continuities of other values. Thus, for example, we find that the Amish do not resist the technology *per se*, but a particular appropriation of it which transgresses the long-term moral environment of the household. The very rich data on which these studies depend is drawn from the participant-observation style 'ethnography' but could also be drawn from historical analysis which is perhaps somewhat under-represented in the volume.

The third view of culture represented in this volume is one which stresses the indeterminacy of meaning. We are constantly surrounded by objects and relationships which we might render meaningful in particular contexts and to particular effect but cultural

practice continually seeps through the bounded units of classificatory systems or interpretative models. It is this approach which offers a direct challenge to those who draw their conclusions from survey data and interviews, or from very narrow contexts of activity. As Haddon notes, family research can highlight negotiations about adoption and use of ICTs but can tell us little about what motivates these decisions and activities.

Campbell raises some of these issues in a different way in his exploration of the relationship between modern consumption and desire and the processes through which novelty is created. The new, the innovative and the novel are distinguished in terms of the moral values which inform and impel the desire for new products which might embrace deeply conservative forces, Enlightenment values which centre on progress and development, or Romantic ideas about individual freedom. Campbell also highlights the importance of pleasure in accounting for motivation, and is particularly interested in the contemporary condition of 'self-illusory hedonism'. This article thus evokes both the cultural specificity of our motivations, our understandings of the self, and our constant engagement with particular cultural forms such as the 'imaginative enjoyments offered by the modern mass media' (p. 61).

Could these subtleties be captured by questionnaires? How can we ask about the contemporary effects of ICTs? Ien Ang offers a fascinating piece on what asking this question entails, by looking at how the media industry seeks to measure the effects of its programmes on the audience. Audience research has been complicated by the fact that viewers now use cable, satellite, the VCR and the remote control, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the television industry to guarantee that they are delivering receptive audiences to their funders, the advertisers. Ang argues that in response to this challenge, the television companies have introduced increasingly complex technologies of surveillance to monitor the audience, but measures of the size of audience will never tell anything about how people are watching. The relationship between having the television on, watching the programmes, watching the commercials and buying the products is highly elusive. And it is elusive because of the nature of human social practice. Following de Certeau, Ang stresses the tactical nature of social life, and the embeddedness of our activities such that to ask one person about how they watch may not be the same question when asked of another. Most importantly, Ang points out that such research plays a strategic rather than an analytic role in the organization and operations of cultural industries and stresses that 'any attempt to construct positive knowledge about the "real consumer" will always be provisional, partial, fictional' (p. 142).

Although this article is quite explicitly directed at the television industry's attempts to increase its surveillance of the audience, Ang's

contribution also implicitly comments on all those who assume that watching television, or using a micro-computer is a discrete activity, about which information can be gathered through the administration of a questionnaire. Ang argues that if we take seriously the idea that watching television is an activity embedded in the context of everyday life, and that this context is mobile, indefinite and ultimately ambiguous, and beyond prediction and measurement, then we require a fully fledged ethnographic mode of understanding, a solution which is 'epistemologically unbearable for an industry whose very economic operation depends on some fixed and objectified description of the audience commodity' (p. 142).

The Reactive Viewer thoroughly endorses Ang's claim that there is a general trend within the media industry for more accurate measurement in response to more fragmented viewing practices. Indeed it is also recognized by the industry that measurements are no longer sufficient and attention must now be paid to viewer motivation, to different kinds of audiences and levels of attention and enjoyment. Products might sell better to a smaller audience if the audience is a committed one.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming impression that this book gives is that the industry still assumes that this complex qualitative data can be collected in abstracted quantitive form through the administration of questionnaires, reminiscent of women's magazines in which the answer you would have given is never an available option. Gender, race, class and generation are assumed to be the salient subjectivities that viewers bring to the screen, although there is no discussion of how such categories are conceptualized or constituted. Consumers are two-dimensional figures with no internal contradictions, complex experience or ambiguous attitudes towards the activities in which they are engaged. The margin for exaggerated inaccuracy when these results are multiplied by the number of respondents might make us wonder why the industry bothers – except for Ang's timely reminder that this information, even in qualitative form, is still strategic; still part of the tactical engagement between the television industry and its sponsors.

In partial recognition of this problem the viewing diary is seen as the most accurate indication of 'the cognitive and affective states of viewers while they watch' (p. 82) which puts me in mind of the Mass Observation project at the beginning of this century. However, despite the very interesting work that has been carried out on the collection and analysis of this kind of social information and the ways in which various agencies transform the information into 'social facts', there is no hint of awareness here concerning interpretative theory.

Gunter and Wober's book is extremely detailed and might be useful for the historian of the television industry as it outlines the history of audience reaction research in the UK and relates it to

other European countries and to the USA. The questionnaires are themselves interesting as cultural documents and allow a vision of what have been, and are currently assumed to be, self-evident categories of experience. These have sometimes been abstracted from the discourses of viewers, sometimes from the industry itself, but always articulated in a homogeneous form for the final production of statistics.

The authors also note that the advertisers are not interested in fine-grained social and cultural information on their viewers, as this is too difficult to use. This detached stance on their material may be due to the fact that the book was commissioned by the Independent Television Commission. We thus have to look elsewhere for any analysis of exactly what this kind of audience reaction research represents in cultural terms.

Interpreting Audiences does not answer this question but fully redresses the balance in other ways. Moores has provided a sophisticated yet accessible introduction to analyses of media reception which have some independence from the strategies of the industry. Here we find reviewed a style of audience research which is explicitly connected to larger debates on cultural consumption, and associated in particular with the work of Bourdieu and de Certeau, and the tension that the juxtaposition of these two cultural theorists provides with their respective interest in constraint and creativity. Moores advocates critical ethnography, in the style of David Morley and Janice Radway, which stresses the embeddedness of consumption and the importance of attending to the complexities of motivation and desire. The hidden challenge that this book contains again refers to the practice of ethnography. The radical disruption and separation of classic anthropological fieldwork, through which the researcher's own implicit cultural assumptions are made visible, no longer provides a model for this new field of ethnographic interest in which the researcher is more like to have a starting point of identification. The challenge is not simply how simultaneously to maintain sympathy with popular culture while remaining alert to ideological evaluation and critique (p. 69), but also about how to make visible the cultural specificities of one's own particular practices.

review:

Ross Gibson, *South of the West – Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Arts and Politics of the Everyday series). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, 258pp.

ALAN McKEE

What is postcolonialism?

If such an impertinent question can be answered, that answer must come less in the form of delineation than in a process of accretion. Ross Gibson's book, *South of the West*, contributes to an understanding of what postcolonialism might be, not by explicitly addressing the issue but rather tangentially, through an exegetical approach to questions of cultural production in what he regards as a postcolonial nation – contemporary Australia.

The comparatively recent establishment of Australia as a single nation has led to a peculiarly unstable national identity: one which seems to involve its cultural commentators in a constant process of re-creation. Gibson's work is part of a recognizable tradition. For example, his suggestion that Australian identity may be more usefully communicated in signifiers of localism – 'icons, idioms and leitmotifs' (p. 172) – than through haltingly self-conscious narratives of the outback; or his identification of failure as an important component of many Australian narratives: these ideas follow on from and develop previous work done by Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner in this area.[1]

Gibson's central argument is that Australian identity is predicated upon a contradiction at its very heart. Australia is the 'south of the west', he argues, exploring the geographical metaphors which have

1 Stuart Cunningham, 'Hollywood genres, Australian movies', in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds), *An Australian Film Reader* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1985); Graeme Turner, *National Fictions* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

been used to locate the continent to show how the 'South', in a European tradition, has stood synonymously for an Other. Australia, as a South-land, is shown to have been constructed in terms of its very marginality to that source of colonial power which 'discovered' it. It is this which leads to what Gibson describes as the 'bifurcated' nature of Australian identity – the very self, for an Australian, is displaced (p. xi). In terms of a practical Australian identity, 'we' are not defined simply in relation to the other: 'we' also *are* the other – the south of the west.

Not only, Gibson argues, has history problematized Australian national identity, but recent attempts at self-definition have complicated the notion further. The 'multiculturalism' that was for a time embraced as specifically Australian may help explain why modern Australianness is so unstable. When difference is emphasized as an aspect of identity, then 'alien cultural factors must be counted as definitively Australian' (p. 197): the Australian community can be described as 'incommensurable diaspora' (p. 197).

But is it simply this contradictory nature of its identity which renders Australia 'postcolonial'? One weakness of Gibson's book is that at no point does he theorize what he means by the term 'postcolonialism'. Unfortunately, this leads to confusion between this term and another which he uses with far greater regularity – postmodernism. Indeed, Gibson often seems to be describing Australia more as a postmodern ('wildstyle' [p. 200]) than a postcolonial culture. Although the title of the book proclaims engagement with postcolonialism, the word is rarely used in the text: and when this erudite book appeals to referees on modern culture, the writers referenced are not Spivak or Bhabha, but Derrida and Lyotard.

Gibson casually links the two domains – 'postmodernism has a history (called "colonialism")' (p. 200) – in a way which effaces any suggestion that the two terms might not be congruent; or that, indeed, there is a recent and complex history of writing solely attempting to address the tensions between the two.[2] Adam and Tiffin, for example, tentatively offer the following description of the differences between the movements: 'postcolonialism is more overtly concerned with politics than is postmodernism . . . the postmodern (in conjunction with poststructuralism) has exercised and is still exercising a cultural and intellectual hegemony in relation to the postcolonial world and over postcolonial cultural productions'.[3]

In fact, although never explicit, Gibson does offer two strategies for resolving these tensions.

Firstly, the fact that postcolonialism recognizes the need for colonized nations to construct distinct national identities for themselves must be reconciled with a postmodern urge to dissolution and relativization of identities (inter- or transnationalism). Gibson addresses this by attempting to define the uniqueness of

2 See, for example: Simon During, 'Postcolonialism or postmodernism today', *Textual Practice*, vol. 1 (1987), pp. 32–47; Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

3 Adam and Tiffin, *Past the Last Post*, p. x.

Australianness as being its very postmodern nature – that historically, Australia's identity has always been a self-abnegating one. His description of a diaspora-identity links oxymoronic terms in such an attempt at reconciliation. This is a culture defined by its very blankness, its openness to 'alien cultural factors' (p. 197).

The second attempt to reconcile theoretical approaches involves applying postmodernism's own cultural logic of relativism and localism to the relationship between the two terms. If it is acknowledged that postmodernism, like all narratives, has a history; and that that history can be read as one of a western-centred intellectual imperialism; it then becomes possible to mobilize 'postcolonial readings of postmodern discourse [which] compensate for this emphasis on the global by focussing on local historical and geographical specificities, situating postmodernism in relation to these practices rather than the other way around'.[4] Gibson provides a useful illustration of this point when he describes attitudes towards nature ('Nature') in narratives of Australian selfhood.

4 Ibid., p. xi.

Landscape and nature recur throughout the book, central aspects of Australian narratives: 'the nature/culture dialectic is necessarily the one that has shaped the history of land in modern Australia' (p. 8). Colonial narratives, Gibson asserts, attempted to dominate nature, simultaneously revealing their terror of its sublimity. Postmodern and postcolonial impulses, by comparison, share a common trajectory towards accommodation. Part of what he identifies as the postcolonial narrative is an acceptance, a loosening of control, in relation both to other cultures, and to the landscape of the continent. Similarly, postmodernism presents a relaxation of control; except here, the nature which is allowed to be a functioning part of Australians' environments is itself redefined to produce a 'postmodernist, second-degree kind of ecology' (p. 224), where nature includes 'not only sunshine, clouds, landforms and all things "green", but also the cinema, television, pop music, books, motor cars, magazines, and all available mass-mediated images and sounds. All this nature is part of my culture' (p. 223). Nature becomes 'the given environment that one is born into' (p. 223). It is in this, the most interesting redefinition proposed by Gibson, that the postcolonial and the postmodern can be seen to be comfortably coexisting; where the one informs and is a useful contribution towards the project of the other. Australia's cultural identity is uniquely reliant upon a relationship with Nature, which both postcolonial and postmodern narratives promote as one of accommodation.

However, in using these strategies, Gibson only partly succeeds. In not addressing the term 'postcolonial' directly, he evades what should be a central question: how relevant is it to talk about 'Australia' as a postcolonial nation? For at no point does Gibson suggest how the experience of those who were colonized – the

indigenous Australians – has been, and is still, used as material in the process of constructing an Australian national identity.

Other writing on Australian postcolonialism makes explicit just how central is Aboriginality to the Australian identity.[5] By contrast, in Gibson's book, Aboriginality is constantly present but never explicitly addressed. There is no attempt to explore the ways in which Australian identity has often relied upon representations of indigenous culture. For example, Gibson's 'icons, idioms and leitmotifs' of Australian identity in the *Mad Max* films (George Miller, 1979; 1981; 1985) would surely have to include the razor-edged boomerang used by the feral child in the second film.

Mobilizing Aboriginality in relation to an argument about postcolonialism also involves challenging the term itself. Is it useful to describe settler culture as 'postcolonial' if that term is also being applied to the indigenous people of a country? To suggest that settlers and Aborigines suffered equally under the historical regime of colonialism, and that both are now making similar climbs back to separate identity, is offensive and inaccurate. If contemporary settler experience is indeed postcolonial, it is a very different postcoloniality from that facing Aboriginal Australians. When even the most recent history is one of political disenfranchisement (Aborigines could not vote until the 1960's); of children being forcibly removed from mothers to promote assimilation of the race; of exclusion from schools; continuing unemployment, ill health and indefensibly short life expectancy – in the face of all of this, to wantonly equate settler and Aboriginal relief at 'postcolonialism' is misleading, and mistaken.

But more than this, the very term 'postcolonial' might be a dangerous one. While there is little at stake in the 'post' of 'postmodernism', the relationship of the postcolonial to that which has gone before is crucial. The 'post' equates chronological progression with cultural evolution – colonialism is past, it seems to say; it is gone. Oppression, inequality, these are things of the past. This is not the case.

Marcia Langton, an Australian academic, Aborigine, and writer on film, suggests a necessary project of 'anti-colonialism'[6] – an active attempt to address those fictions which have shored up the colonial project. By comparison, 'postcolonialism' seems too much like Stuart Hall's 'non-racism' a term and a practice which suggest that simply by ignoring racist narratives and institutional practices, a 'level playing field' can be asserted, and racism will vanish.[7] Similarly, in the very name of postcolonialism comes the reassurance that colonialism need no longer be confronted, that all it stood for is discredited. In the meantime, land rights are mocked in Australian newspapers, Aboriginal deaths in custody continue, and representations of Aboriginal people in Australia are still constrained by conventions and images that have come down from

5 See, for example: Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991).

6 Marcia Langton, *Well I Heard It on the Radio and I Saw It on the Television* (Sydney: AFC, 1993)

7 Stuart Hall, 'Whites of their eyes: racist ideologies and the media', in George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (eds), *Silver Linings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981).

colonialism with much of their potency intact. How would Gibson's book have differed had he rather written an anticolonial account of Australian narrative and identity?

Despite this, the book stands as a useful contribution to debates around Australian identity. Perhaps it is most useful as a part of that process of accretional definition suggested above. For not only is it *about* Australian culture, it is, of course, a part of it. In this, its nature as a collection of essays proves one of its strengths. As Stuart Cunningham has asserted in relation to genre, Australian identity begins to emerge most successfully when cultural production is not self-consciously straining to be Australian. In making arguments about the effects of archival photographs, or the 'mnemonic' function of postmodern art, Gibson promotes a new idea of Australian identity simply by using specifically Australian examples to illustrate his work. Such arguments provide material for future discussions of Australia's famous 'cultural cringe'. In this move away from all-encompassing metanarratives of Australianness, Gibson's book is part of a move to localism: that cultural production which will continue to construct Australian identity as a fascinating and contradictory part of contemporary national politics.